

# **LIGHTS ON THE UPANISHADS**

**T.V.KAPALI SASTRY**



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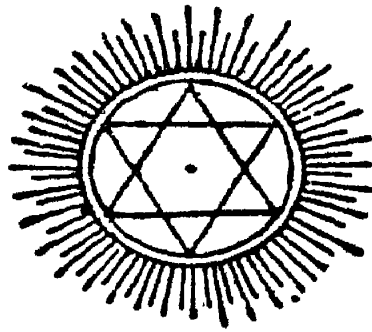
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## NOTE

*Lights on the Upanishads* is a fresh exposition of the main Vidyas of the Upanishads. The chief spiritual disciplines in the Upanishads are dealt with in the light of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and Philosophy. It discusses and shows that the Upanishads are not at all metaphysical speculations but precious Manuals of Sadhana of the ancient Rishis.

All these articles except one appeared serially in the ADVENT Quartely under the title of 'Readings from the Upanishads'. 'Vedic Wisdom in the Vedanta' was contributed to the Second Annual of the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay. Being a connected subject it is included in the book. Thanks are due to the Editors for their kind permission to publish these in book form.



## CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. SKANDA SANATKUMARA BHUMA VIDYA ... ..	I
II. PRANA VIDYA ... ..	20
III. SHANDILYA VIDYA ... ..	41
IV. VAISHVANARA VIDYA ... ..	64
V. THE KATHOPANISHAD ... ..	85
VI. VEDIC WISDOM IN THE VEDANTA THE MYSTIC HONEY ... ..	115
VII. CONCLUSION ... ..	151

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## CHAPTER ONE

### SKANDA SANATKUMARA

THE short paragraph at the end of the seventh chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad closes with this statement—"The blessed Sanatkumara shows the shore beyond darkness, and him they call Skanda, yea, they call him Skanda."<sup>1</sup>

Here some questions arise from the equation that is affirmed of Sanatkumara with Skanda and, indeed, from the very mention of the two names for the first time to which no reference is made elsewhere in this, or any other early Upanishad. What is the occasion for this statement? What are the implications? Let us first state the purport of the passage with reference to the context and then proceed to consider the relevancy of these concluding lines of this section, so that we could make an effective attempt to appreciate the text in the light of the lines of thought adopted in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo.

Narada, learned in the Vedic lore, well-versed in all the sciences of the age, approaches Sanatkumara

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<sup>1</sup> तमसस्परं दर्शयति भगवान् सनत्कुमारस्तं  
स्कन्द इत्याचक्षते तं स्कन्द इत्याचक्षते ।

for a higher knowledge. However thorough his learning be, he finds something still wanting, feels the need for that knowledge by which he could cross over to the other side of "Sorrow". Sanatkumara grants the request of Narada and we have here a vivid description of the Indescribable, the Vast, *bhūmā*, the One, the Self, the seer of which sees neither death nor disease nor sorrow. At the close, the Upanishad declares that the One Self, the Vast, becomes the multiple soul, *ekadhā tridhā bahudhā bhavati*.

And we come to the concluding passage with which we are at present concerned. Here the Upanishad throws out hints on certain ideas pertaining to the means and the end, *sādhana* and *siddhi* and each of these ideas rests upon many others familiar to those for whom were intended these Upanishads which in effect, purpose and content were a kind of Manuals of Sadhana. Here is an English rendering of the passage: "In the purity of nourishment, *āhāra*, lies the purity of the stuff of being, *sattva*; *sattva* being pure, the immediate remembrance becomes constant and fixed; by this remembrance, there is release from all the knots. To such a one, stainless, the Blessed Sanatkumara shows the shore beyond darkness; they call him Skanda, yea, they call him Skanda."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धिः सत्त्वशुद्धौ ध्रुवा स्मृतिः स्मृतिलम्भे सर्व-  
ग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः । तस्मै मृदितकषायाय तमसस्परं दर्शयति भगवान्  
सनत्कुमारः तं स्कन्द इत्याचक्षते तं स्कन्द इत्याचक्षते ॥



To get at the purport of the sentence, we must first determine the sense and fix in our minds the exact connotation of the Sanskrit words *āhāra*, *sattva* and *smṛti*. For there is no surer way to miss the significance of the whole passage than to rely upon any translation or lexicon, for these terms are significant and teem with a number of suggestions arising from the whole body of the teachings of this Upanishad. We must also bear in mind that the Chhandogya is one of the few earlier and authentic Upanishads which form part of the Brahmanas, where we hear of the many Vidyas, the spiritual disciplines—sadhanas,—by which the initiate sets out to realise and live the Truth as envisaged and propagated to him by the seer, his teacher, the *ācārya*.

From the point of view of these Vidyas, the Chhandogya is the one Upanishad that is most consulted by the author of the Brahmasutras where reference is made to the Chhandogya texts for ten Vidyas out of a dozen or more from all the major Upanishads that are taken up for clarification. Any attempt to understand the exact method of these sadhanas is bound to meet with a very partial success at best, as the actual method is not recorded anywhere in detail. We can from the data available in the texts guess that the teacher who was always a seer admitted the disciple for initiation on being convinced of his fitness for receiving the Vidya. He trained him for the life, put into him the necessary seed of realisation, allowed it to grow and bear fruit in the right season. Thus these Brahma-vidyas

were communicated in silence through the influence and example of the Guru, rather than through precept which occupied a brief and formal place in the scheme of the spiritual culture of these ancients. We learn from the Taittiriya that Bhrigu Varuni was asked first to realise that Matter was Brahman and through successive stages by Tapas in the interval between one stage and another he realised Brahman ultimately as Ananda. This is called *Bhārgavī Vāruṇī Vidyā*.

This is just an instance to illustrate that these Vidyas are summarily noticed and simply named after the teacher or the pupil who practised the particular Vidya with success. There are other Vidyas which are named after the character or the central aspect of the Vidya, e.g., *udgītha vidyā*, *samvarga vidyā*, or after the most suitable form that is the nearest approach to the Truth, as in the case of *bhūmā vidyā* or *dahara vidyā*.

It is the mention of such names of Vidyas and one or two broad hints that are all that we find recorded as the Acharya's precepts to the initiate. It is against this background we have to search for and discover the sense of the passage that we have taken up for discussion. These concluding lines give us an idea of the sadhana that helps one to realise the *bhūmā*, the Vast Self, which is the All and includes the All—the Immortal which seen, dispels all darkness and sorrow, sickness and death. We get an idea of the *bhūmā* from what has been stated earlier in the section. One can understand, mentally appreciate and in a way

assimilate the concept of *bhūmā*, even allow it to dominate or recast the texture of one's mind. That has a great value for him, the mental being; for it infuses a settled illumined faith in the mind. But still that is no realisation; a brilliant concept in itself does not go far for a living experience of the truth that is conceived, however cherished it may be in the mind.

Let us then take up the first two terms *āhāra-śuddhi* and *sattva-śuddhi*. *Śuddhi* is purity. At the outset we are confronted with a difficulty. How is one to determine what is pure and what is not? If *āhāra* means food, as is commonly understood, and some commentators have done so, then have we to leave the question of purity in food to be decided by reference to our sentiments and prejudices or to the 'religion of the kitchen'? *Āhāra* means derivatively whatever is brought near and has come to mean food because it is taken in. *Āhāra*, according to Acharya Shankara, means knowledge of sense objects, *śabdādiviṣaya-vijñānam*. If in sense contacts one is careful and free from desire and disgust and passion, the inner instrument, *antaḥ karaṇa*, called *sattva* here, becomes pure. Shankara has solved the problem of purity by relying on the derivative significance of *āhāra* and taking *sattva* to mean *antaḥ karaṇa* as is done in the later works and the Gita and is perfectly intelligible. Our difficulty then comes to this. Does the text mean by *āhāra*, food or sense mind or can it be both? Does the text mean by *sattva*, the inner instrument or something else which may include it? To find an answer to this

question, we have fortunately clues given in the Upanishad itself.

In the previous chapter, the Upanishad has spoken of three elements, *dhātus*, in all food called *tejas*, *ap*, *anna* (Fire, Water and Earth), yielding their essential principles *vāk*, *prāṇa*, *manas* (Speech or Voice, Life and Mind) respectively. To understand what precisely is meant by this threefold division of elements and principles, we must have a general idea of the setting of the Upanishad. Living at this distance of time, it is not easy for us to appreciate the symbolism of ceremonial rites that this Upanishad frequently resorts to in declaring the value and importance of certain religious practices of the time. Besides, it has no theories to propound; it takes up things as they present themselves to our common experience, treats men as they understand themselves to be, and directs them to courses of rites and disciplines acting to a sense of what they owe to themselves and their fellow beings as well as to the Gods. For the Vedic Gods are not entirely forgotten—as Cosmic Beings and Powers they carry on their functions within us and in the universe, have their full sway over men and things.

The Sun and Moon and Earth, the Wind, the Fire, the Waters, what to us appear as inanimate, all these are animated, directed, and controlled and presided over by the Gods. They are their concrete figures and living symbols through which approach was made to the One-without-a-second, to the God of gods, to the Self of selves. Such an understanding

faith was common and current in the times of these Upanishads.

This Upanishad, then, through various *upāsanās* gradually infuses an unfailing spirit in the seeker to build a deeper and inner life fit to realise the One, the Immortal. It speaks of three elements and not five as the comparatively later Taittiriya does. Everywhere mostly, it makes a threefold division, *trivṛt-karaṇa* and not *pañcī-karaṇa*. The three essential elements in all food are *tejas*, *ap*, *anna*, Fire, Water and Earth. This is the creative Trinity that forms into the outer stuff of our inner being and sustains the material body which it churns, as it were, causes to yield and evolve *vāk*, *prāṇa* and *manas*, Voice, Life and Mind. It may seem queer to the mentality of our age to be told that mind is grosser than life and life than voice or speech, and that voice is the subtlest of the three elements or Dhatus that make up the subtle substance of our being. But by voice, *vāk*, is meant the power of expression; it is in its source the creative Word proceeding from the *tapas*, the Divine incubation. Hence *tejas* is said to be the principle of *vāk*. There may not be difficulty in understanding Water, the fluidic force, to be the principle of life. But mind ? Certainly it is the grossest in this scheme because it is swallowed up by the gross objects it rises from and runs after.

Thus we see that in the scheme of this Upanishad, it is these *dhātus* or elements *vāk*, *prāṇa* and *manas* that are the component parts of the subtle stuff of

being, *sattva*, the purity of which is affirmed to result from purity of food, *āhāra-śuddhi*. We can better appreciate *sattva* in this sense of *dhātu*, when we remember the expression *dhātu-prasāda* occurring in a later Upanishad.<sup>1</sup> We have seen that *sattva* is not mind alone, but mind, life and power of expression. It is this that sustains the embodied existence here and is the vehicle of the soul in its journey to the other worlds and rebirth.

Now how is the purity to be got ? In a still earlier chapter, the fifth, the Upanishad speaks of *prāṇa-agnihotra*, the mystical oblation to the *vaiśvānara*, the Universal Person, in which the food that is taken in (or offered to others) is offered to the Universal in the form of the Vital Fire in one's own being. That the food is offered to the Divine Being within us and that it must be so felt is the central idea of this *agnihotra*. Hence runs the saying that one must eat in silence, *maunena bhoktavyam*. Whoever knows how

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<sup>1</sup> *Dhātu-prasāda* in Katha II. 20. is the same as *sattva śuddhi* according to Shankara; he states clearly that *dhātu* means mind and other instruments, "*mana adini karaṇāni dhātavaḥ*": he means *antaḥ karaṇa* which indeed is generally understood to be the sense of *sattva* in later writings. But *dhātu* connotes something connected with the physical organism also. In rendering into English *dhātu* in *dhātu-prasāda* in the Katha text, Sri Aurobindo has used a word which conveys the sense of all that the Sanskrit word connotes: "Temperament"—a happy expression which at once refers to the physical and psychological elements.

As for *prasāda*, it is of course, purification, *śuddhi*, according to Sri Aurobindo as well as to Shankara.

to perform this rite, this offering of food to the Divine Being within us, eats purity itself, takes in strength itself. The Upanishad says that all the sins of such a one are burnt to ashes just as the fibrous tuft of a reed thrown into fire.

This is the purity of food that the text speaks of, and it gives in its turn purity of *sattva* the character of which we have already dealt with at some length.

Now we shall take up the question of *smṛti-lambha*, the acquiring of *smṛti*. By *smṛti* is meant an immediate awareness of what one is seeking, an intuitive reference to the constant presence of the subject meditated upon or the object sought after. In the context, it is the idea of the *bhūmā ātman*, the Vast Self, that fills or presses upon the mind opening it to the intuition of the presence of the *bhūmā*; it is this intuition that is acquired by an exalted and purified understanding illumining the whole *sattva* which, in the language of later scriptures can very well include *svabhāva*, nature, or temperament and qualities and the mind-stuff as well. To extend the connotation of *smṛti* to intuition may not be acceptable to modern scholarship. But some considerations warrant us to fix the sense of the word thiswise. Firstly, *śruti* and *smṛti* are Vedic terms, the former denotes the inspirational, spiritual audience, the latter intuitive discovery of what has been heard by the mystical subtle hearing. That is why Smṛiti or Dharma Shastra is supposed to be a discovery of the sense of the *śruti* which was lost to the direct hearing. Secondly, any other sense will not

fit in with the context. A mere remembrance of the traditional doctrine or of the sense of a textual passage does not require such a strong and pure *sattva*. Nor can sheer memory of that character dispel the many phases of ignorance that the embodied soul is beset with. And when the Upanishad speaks of the *knots*, the knots are not a product of poetic fancy or a philosophic concept in the sphere of Metaphysics. They are entanglements of subtle nerve-force lodged in a frame of psycho-physical structure which acts on and reacts to the functionings of the nervous system that links the subtler levels and conditions of being to the grosser material body. The *smṛti*, then, is not a mere memory, but an intuition that carries with it a certain dynamism that cuts asunder these knots of ignorance.

The Upanishad proceeds to say that when this intuitive grasp of *bhūmā* becomes firm and constant, *dhruva*, there is a release from all the knots, *sarva-granthīnām vipramokṣaḥ*. What are those knots? They represent the desires, passions, attachments and a host of other binding factors by which the embodied being feels chained to the body, life and mind, feels them to be itself and mistakes for its own being the ego, a posing figure of the true Self. These knots form a protective envelope for the radical knot of the ego, covering the true soul, the Purusha. The text says in effect that the acquiring of the constant *smṛti* is an effective means by which these knots of ignorance are loosened and untied leaving the radical ego-knot to be treated by a special means, a means other than



the constant and fixed *smṛti*, the intuition, which is not sufficient to cut off the knot in the heart, *hṛdaya-granthi*. For, as is elsewhere in the Upanishads stated, the knot in the heart is cut off only by the direct perception of the Supreme, *tasmin dṛṣṭe parātpare*. How is this Supreme Perception possible—this realisation and consummation ? Now, this question is answered in the latter part of the sentence: “To such a one Bhagavan Sanatkumara shows the shore beyond Ignorance.” Let us pause and consider the implication of this statement, and then proceed to discover clues, if any, that could help us to appreciate the mention of Sanatkumara as the deliverer, who is also called Skanda in this connection.

Here is an implicit declaration that however arduous the Vidya or spiritual discipline that one adopts and follows to a successful end, it cannot itself bring the realisation of the ultimate Truth. One can achieve the purification of the inner instrumental substance through the offering of consecrated food to the Agni, *Vaiśvānara*, the Universal Purusha within us and train himself and learn to feel that it is the Divine Being within that accepts the food as oblation and eats and causes to eat, *bhoktā bhojayitā ca Bhagavān*, as the early Vedantic sadhaka did ; one can purify the inner instrument, *antah karaṇa* by the later Vedantic methods of training the sense-contacts to be free from greed, desire, disgust and a host of other disturbing forces of life, as are so impressively discoursed upon in the Gita. By that purity gained, one can open

himself to an intuition in a mind calm or in the high altitudes of exalted thought ; by the intuition one can have a constant remembrance of the Most High, the *paramam*, the Plenum, *bhūmā*, the Self, *ātman*. Without effort, so spontaneously can one hold the Idea in his mind that it would be impossible for him to be without it even for a moment. These are no mean successes in the sadhana ; and they yield notable results too ; they dissolve all the elements of bondage, all factors that branch out of the original ignorance, *mūla-avidyā*, rooted in the heart.

But Purity, an intuitive grasp, a fixed and constant memory with all their good results, can go far, but not far enough ; they stop short of the highest reach ; all the personal exertions in the sadhana with their fruits do not arrive at the core of realisation, or soar to the highest summit. One can go, with the means at his disposal won by sadhana, deep within towards the innermost apartment of the Self, and knock and knock, but the door of the chamber is still closed ; he has to wait and watch until the door opens at the will of the Atman who is the revealer. Nowhere in the Upanishads where instructions of the Sadhanas are given, we find that the realisation is the fruit of the personal effort alone. These disciplines and methods of approach prepare the journey towards the goal and make one fit for the consummation. Even when an exclusive choice is made for realising the Self, it is the Self that reveals its own body to the seeker, *tasya eṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanum svām*, and not that the seeker

storms the gate and discovers the Self by the merit of his own sadhana.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore to one well-equipped with the riches of the sadhana, strong and steady, prepared in the manner mentioned above or in a like manner for the supreme event, the Deliverer comes with his gift, carries him safe across the ocean of darkness to the other side where reigns the Supreme Effulgence. He comes from beyond the range of the personal self, for his helping hand comes stretching from outside into the sphere of personal exertion in the sadhana to crown it ultimately with success, *siddhi*.

This question remains—why is the Deliverer named Sanatkumara? There will be no difficulty in understanding the Deliverer to be the Supreme Self, *parama*

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is to Katha Upanishad II. 23; the same is found in Mundaka III. 2. 3. The verse is interpreted in two ways; a thorough discussion of the sense of the verse and the construction of the passage would involve a space beyond the limit we have set for ourselves here, nor is it quite necessary for our purpose. To show the marked contrast between the two interpretations, we shall give the substance.

“He chooses the Self who is chosen by the Self.” The Self here is the Supreme Self, *Parama ātman* or God. This interpretation is Sri Aurobindo’s. And this is Shankara’s: “To him who makes an exclusive choice of the Self, the Self reveals its own body (its own truth).” What is important for us to note here is that even according to Shankara the act of revealing belongs to the Self.

In this connection it will be interesting to note a passage from Shankara in his commentary on the 16th verse of Isha, a rather inconvenient Upanishad. “By the grace of Thy Self, I see (that most auspicious form)” *tava ātmanah prasādāt paśyāmi*.



Sanatkumara of the Chhandogya Upanishad is the same as Sanatsujata, the Divine sage. In his discourse on spiritual truths addressed to Dhritarashtra, Vidura comes to a stage when he invokes, by Yoga power, the presence of Sanatkumara and implores him to give the necessary instruction. “*Yogabalena āhūya*” is a significant phrase; for it shows that Sanatkumara the Divine sage has his abode elsewhere and is not a terrestrial Being. Where is his abode ? What precisely is the sense of the word Sanatsujata ? Let us hear what the commentary says :<sup>1</sup> “*Sanat* means *sanātana*, the Eternal, *brahma* called *hiranyagarbha*; from that Eternal Brahma’s mind is born excellently, with knowledge and dispassion etc., the blessed Sanatkumara, who is therefore called Sanatsujata.”

These lines throw light on the origin and character of Sanatkumara. We gather that Sanatkumara is called Sanatsujata because of the knowledge, dispassion and other Divine qualities with which he was born; that these qualities have been there from his very birth and are natural to his being because he is an issue from Brahman, the Eternal; that he does not spring from *para brahman*, the *parātpara*, the Absolute beyond the All, but from *brahman* as *hiranyagarbha*, the Creator from the summit of the Cosmos of which

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<sup>1</sup> सनत् इति सनातनं ब्रह्मोच्यते हिरण्यगर्भाख्यम् तस्मात् सनातनात् ब्रह्मणो मानसात् ज्ञानवैराग्यादिसमन्वितः सुष्ठु जात इति सनत्सुजात इत्युक्तो भगवान् सनत्कुमारः ॥



matter, is not the sole existence and that in its creation or formation it is preceded, penetrated, sustained and directed by forces subtler and higher than we can normally conceive of. It is true that these forces can be traced to the One source and support of all existences; but they do emanate from an Intelligence or intelligent Beings in the high levels of existence, themselves behaving and functioning as limbs of the Supreme Being, *sa ātmā; aṅgāni anya-devatāḥ*. Ultimately, we can say that all gods are but One God; why, we can easily admit that all existences, manifestations, beings, men or gods and all that *is* and *is not*, *sat ca asat ca*, is the God, the Sole Reality. But that does not nullify the practical truth of the difference in created beings or gods or their functionings. We may take an instance from modern thought. Nature is a scientific unit; advanced scientific thought, let us say, the Theory of Relativity has reduced a piece of matter to a system of events, so much so that it is no longer regarded as a stuff of the world; and the hypothesis that the “physical” and the “mental” are essentially similar or one is becoming possible. Well, does all this negative the practical truth of the structures and functionings of the innumerable organisms and forces, energies, heat, light, electricity and the rest ?

The Gods, then, are distinct Beings with their special functions ; they may bear different names in different climes or ages. The Rig Veda speaks of Agni, the Divine Fire, as the youngest of the Gods ; he is the Divine Child, *kumāra* ; his functions vary

with the planes or levels of being ; in the high levels of this Cosmic existence where is his own home, the Home also of the Gods, he leads the army of Gods to fight the Asuras. In the Purana he is called *Skanda*, *Kumāra*, *Devasenānī*, leader of the army of the Gods. When he vanquishes the chief of the Asuras, the Asura called *Śūra* is slain by his weapon called *Shakti* and changes into a peacock to become a fit vehicle, *vāhana*, of his Divine slayer. We need not enter into the details of these symbolisms used in the later Puranas ; nor is it necessary to reconcile every detail in the Puranas with what we find in the Rig Veda or Mahabharata. It is enough for our purpose to note the significance of identifying Skanda with Sanatkumara. The Upanishad has not spoken of the fight that the spiritual seeker has to put up against the forces of evil that obstruct his journey towards the Truth, Light, Immortality. The mention of Skanda, the Warrior-God, as identical with Sanatkumara suggests the battle that the blessed Son of the Great God has to give to the Asuric beings and forces for the spiritual uplift of man, before he could bring under control and conquer and slay utterly or transform them wherever possible, as has been shown in the episode of *Śūrapadmāsura* becoming the subdued and transformed cock for Kumara to ride on acclaiming the victory of the Gods.

Whatever the symbols employed to convey the idea, one fact remains and that is the gist of the text that we have considered at some length. However high and



arduous and assured the sadhana be, however steadfast and strong and pure in mind and heart the sadhaka be, whatever notable results be found and noted on the road, however liberal, independent, self-willed and unaided by any source of strength and light the seeker be, however certain the result may seem, the result itself, the final goal, the consummation comes from outside the bounded sphere of the personal self of the sadhaka, from the Deliverer, apparently as the fruit of the labour, or independently of it as a matter of Grace. Or, in the spirit of Universalism of the Vedic and Vedantic seers we may state that when spiritual disciplines yield nourishment to the whole man influencing him in his conduct in the inner and outer life and as a consequence he is firm and strong and constant in his call to the Divine Being that rules over his Destiny in his sojourn on earth, then a Grace, a special Grace of the Divine responds and functions through the Commander of the fighting army of Gods, who is called variously,—Agni in his original abode, Sanatkumara a mental offspring of the creator *hiranyagarbha*, *Brahmamānasaputra*, or Kumara the boy, an issue of the Effulgence of Shiva—and “him they call Skanda, yea, they call him Skanda”.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PRANA VIDYA

*“If one were to tell this to a dried-up stump,  
Sure, branches would shoot forth and leaves spring  
from it.”*

GOSHRUTI, son of Vyaghrapad, student of sacred knowledge, stayed with the teacher, as was usual in those days, for the necessary period of instruction and practical training for the knowledge of Brahman. His teacher, Satyakama, son of the servant girl Jabala, had himself gone through a long course of discipline, *tapasyā*, and by celibacy, *brahmacarya*, and service to the *guru* pleased and won the favour of the Gods—the mystic Bull (Vayu or Indra?), Agni, the Swan, the Water-bird.<sup>1</sup> They, each in his special line, offered to teach and taught him several aspects of Brahman ;

<sup>1</sup> *Madgu*, Water-bird is the symbol of Life, *prāṇa*, and *hamsa*, Swan is the Sun, says Shankaracharya; the supreme Soul or the Golden Person in the Solar world is represented by the Sun, says Sayana in commenting on the famous hymn of Vamadeva—*hamsaḥ śucisat*. It is enough for us to note that the Upanishads use a picturesque language which is at once symbolic and reminiscent of the symbolism of the Rig Veda; also we must not miss the significance of Satyakama receiving help from the Gods for Brahmanvidya while he was under the care of the Guru for that very purpose.

indeed, he learnt the truths by their grace, received the knowledge so well that when the teacher saw him later, his very person bespoke the light of Brahmic wisdom housed in it. Joyous, the Guru at the request of the disciple bestowed on him the blessings of the final touch for consummation, as if out of regard for the tradition that effective knowledge is usually propagated by the teacher to the disciple, *brahmavidyā-santati*. Satyakama in due course became an adept in his turn and specialised in more than one method of approach to the knowledge of Brahman. He was the teacher who initiated Upakosala, son of Kamala, into what is called Akshipurusha Vidya. To Goshruti whom he blessed with the knowledge of Prana Vidya, he concludes his instructions with these words : “If one were to tell this to a dried-up stump, sure, branches would be produced on it and leaves would grow.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the glory of the Prana Vidya of which Goshruti received the knowledge, with the subtleties of practical application, from his master Satyakama. There is no difficulty in grasping the drift of the passage in question. If even a sapless, almost dead stump could revive itself growing to a new-born tree with fresh branches and foliage, man, living, could assuredly develop to a large extent the formative

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<sup>1</sup> Chhandogya Upanishad V. 2.3.

यद्येनत् शुष्काय स्थाणवे ब्रूयात्  
जायेरन् एव अस्मिन् शाखाः  
प्ररोहेयुः पलाशानि ।

powers of Life and expression of the Spirit by opening to the creative power of the Prana Vidya. The paragraphs that follow reinforce this view and in furtherance of the same proclaim that the aspirant for greatness prays for the strength by which he might become or be *all this, aham eva idam sarvam asāni*. By access to a conscious union with the Life-Spirit, i.e., the Spirit that dwells in and controls all life, man could re-live himself opened to a vaster existence, awaken to vistas of a larger Life, and extend his activity to a wider range of possibilities which ordinarily may seem remote for realisation. This is the trend of the text that we have taken up to illustrate the fact that the Upanishads are books as much of knowledge, *jñāna*, as of *upāsana*, a way of approach by which the Knowledge is won.

What is the character of the Prana Vidya that the Upanishad praises with a certain force of rhetoric? Is it the same as Brahma Vidya or subsidiary to it, serving a lesser purpose on the way before the goal is reached? If, as is admitted on all hands, the sole aim of all spiritual endeavour is knowledge of the *param brahman*, taught in the Upanishads, how is it that so many *vidyās* find place in them some of which are said to bring worldly gains to the sadhaka? Such questions arise in our attempt to appreciate the *vidyā sādhanas* that are broadly hinted at or noted with extreme brevity in these concluding portions of the Vedic scriptures, the texts of the Vedanta. In dealing with these questions we must understand and

bear in mind some fundamentals of the Upanishadic teachings. We proceed in these enquiries on the basis that the Upanishads are pre-eminently books of knowledge, records of many methods of approach to the Ultimate Reality, inspired utterances of seers who, by disciplined effort, by whole-souled devotion to their subject, by subtler and higher faculties revelatory and intuitional, developed by special means, penetrated into and broke open the seals of the secrets of subtle psychological and spiritual truths and lived the life of the Spirit.

In their effort they were, as a rule, aided by the tradition of the Vedic Rishis, by the achievements of others who had gone before them, or by the help—not unoften—proffered by the higher Intelligences and Powers of the Universal Spirit itself. Here, we stand on firm grounds relying as we do, on the internal evidence of these scriptures supported by abiding and agelong tradition religious and spiritual and on the testimony of authentic minds that these truths are always verifiable by anyone who is interested and equips himself for the venture. Needless to say that it is an erroneous notion to entertain that the Upanishads are the results of revolt, are the rebel children of the parent religion of a semi-civilised Vedic past. We discard the view, foreign to the spirit and tenor of these sacred texts, that the Upanishads are metaphysical products of speculative labour, which, disrobed of the euphemism, is, in plainer language, bold conjectures of the fantastic or the fabrications of the introvert

—notions that have no correspondence to verifiable truths or observable facts.

The Upanishads, then, represent a fragment of the cumulative knowledge of profound truths perceived and lived by the Vedantic seers. The Chhandogya from which we have taken the instance of Prana Vidya for a general appreciation of these Vidyas, is, like the *Brhadāranyaka*, one of the four or five *Brāhmaṇa-Upaniṣads* which bear the stamp of antiquity among the twelve major texts. It makes an easy and natural use of the terms and symbols of ritualistic worship which formed part of the externals of the Vedic religion. The Gods of the Vedic pantheon—Agni, Vayu, Indra, Surya—are frequently mentioned as having a double function as Nature-Powers in the universe, *adhidaivatam*, and as the lords of the senses, life, mind and other instruments of the soul within us, *adhyātmam*.

When we speak of the Gods of the Upanishads it is necessary to mention that they occupy a relatively subordinate position in these teachings, while in the Rig Veda generally, they are lords in their sovereign right; each one of them is supreme in his place, is indeed the whole Godhead within and behind him, is one front or facet of the Supreme Deity, retaining the particular features for his special function, a distinct Personality for the purpose. But we know that there is one dominant note vibrating throughout the Upanishads and that is the famous dictum that “All this is, verily, Brahman”, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. If all is Brahman, how can the Gods—Agni, Vayu,

Indra, Surya—symbolised by Nature-powers, be excluded from being parts or forms of the Brahman? Certainly any object associated with purity, holiness, strength or something sublime could be chosen as a fit object in which the Supreme Deity could be worshipped. In the Upanishads the gods are taken for forms of worship of Brahman, to meditate upon. But when they are closely related to ritualistic worship, the *upāsanā* is treated as part of the ritual, *karmāṅga vidyā*, said to bring worldly benefits and this need not engage our attention here.

There are still other *upāsanās* which are indirectly parts of *Brahmopāsanā*. For there are two kinds : one is worship indirect, partial, symbolic; the other is direct wherein is made a nearest approach through meditation employing methods and forms which correspond to certain aspects of the character of Brahman as seen and taught by the seers of the Vedānta. This is *mukhya*, the chief or main Upasana to which we shall revert later on : the other is the *angopāsanā* and technically called *pratīka upāsanā*, worship of a limb or part or subsidiary to the main worship. *Pratīka* means a limb, *aṅga* or a part in later Sanskrit : it is a Vedic word which originally meant face, that which moves fronting you, *prati eti*; later it came to mean any part of the body, not merely the face, the frontal aspect. There are instances in the Riks where the word is so explained by Sayana.<sup>1</sup> The Upanishads seem to have had still

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<sup>1</sup> उषसो न प्रतीकं उषसः प्रमुखं इव (ऋग्वेद- VI.50-8 सायणभाष्यम्)

some memory of the *pratīka* character of the Vedic Gods as distinct facets or Personal fronts of the One Supreme Godhead; but in practice, they are regarded as respectable parts or limbs and symbols of worship, mediums for meditation on Brahman. There are many *pratīkas* mentioned in the Upanishads for Upasana and of all of them the Sun is the most glorious symbol of God advocated for worship, *ādityo brahmetyupāsita*. There are two factors that contribute to an effective course of the symbolic worship. The conception of Brahman as specially focussed in the Golden Person that resides in and presides over the Solar world and not the mere solar body as object of worship is an essential element in this *pratīka upāsana*. And this is the other factor : the teachers of the Vedānta have warned that one should not identify himself with the *pratīka* he worships, i.e., the symbol in which he worships the Brahman. This caution was found necessary to avert a possible equation deduced from the two well-known affirmations of the Vedānta :

1. All is Brahman, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*.

2. I am Brahman, *aham brahmāsmi*.

Therefore I am the All which includes the *pratīka* and I am *pratīka*. It is to avoid such a misconception, it is stated, that the worshipper, *upāsaka*, should not conceive himself as any of the *pratīkas* he worships, *na pratīke na hi saḥ*;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, he should have the sublime conception, the supreme idea of

<sup>1</sup> Vedānta Sūtras : IV. 1. 4.



Brahman applied to the *pratīka*; even here the *pratīka* is not to be thought of as Brahman; for although the superior has sway over the inferior and includes it, it is not itself the inferior. Therefore it is the highest conception, the Brahman-Idea that is the ruling principle of all *pratīkopāsanās*, *brahmadṛṣṭir utkarṣāt*.<sup>3</sup>

Now let us turn to the direct and chief methods of approach to Brahman, *mukhya brahmopāsanā*, and see closer into the real character of *prāṇa* and fix the sense in which the Upanishads speak of it as Brahman itself. When *prāṇa* is taken in a limited sense and narrowed down to the vital air, life-breath in the creatures, it is used as a *pratīka* representing Brahman in a comparatively tangible manner and recommended as a means used on the path to reach the goal of Brahmic knowledge. Examples of such *pratīkas* as *prāṇa*, life, *manas*, mind, *ākāśa*, ethereal substance co-extensive with space, are to be found in the Chhandogya and other texts for sadhana; but some of these are directly related to Brahman and are comprehensive, apparently realistic, appealing forms of Brahmopasana itself; *ākāśa* and *prāṇa* are two most important of them indicating as they do, two essential aspects of Brahman. Indeed almost all the sadhanas, especially in the Chhandogya, are, broadly speaking, covered by three Vidyas which have immediate reference to three terms of Brahman, conceived as *ātman*, *ākāśa* and *prāṇa*.

Let us put succinctly what exactly we mean by

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<sup>3</sup> Vedanta Sūtras IV. 1. 5.

Atman. If "All this", *idam sarvam*, is the last term of Brahman, the first term is Atman, the Self, by which is meant the foremost principle of Being, the Self in itself, the Self of All that is and has come to be, the Self of all selves, the Self which *sees*, and is not the *seen*; this Sole Seer is He, the Self-aware Purusha, the One Eternal, Immortal. All the sadhanas which lay stress upon this aspect of Brahman, come under what is called Purusha Vidya.

Thus Brahman, the Atman, is intelligible. But how can Akasha be termed Brahman? Akasha is well-known to be the primary element wherein resides the quality of sound. How can Brahman be termed a mere element, *jada*, insentient, while Brahman is Intelligence itself? We can get an idea of what they mean by Akasha, if we carefully look into some of the relevant passages of the texts. "Akasha is the support, *pratiṣṭhā*, it is the goal, *gati*, the ultimate resort of the world, *parāyaṇam*." "All beings rise from Akasha and set in Akasha." "Verily, it is Akasha that manifests Name and Form and that within which they are is Brahman, that the Immortal, He is the Atman."<sup>1</sup> It is not neces-

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<sup>1</sup> आकाशो वै नाम नामरूपयोर्निर्वहिता ते यदन्तरा तद् ब्रह्म तदमृतं स आत्मा । (Ch. Up. VIII. 14-1.)

*Nirvaha* usually means to carry out; here it means to bring out, for Shankara says *nirvahita* means *vyakarta* and he says elsewhere व्याकरवाणि विस्पष्टं आकरवाणि (Ch. Up. VI. 3. 2.)

Therefore *nirvaha* here is not analysis or separation as is wrongly given in some of the English translations.

sary to multiply instances from other Upanishads also where Akasha is explained as the substance out of which all existences are manifested, all worlds are built, without which nothing can exist, none can live, breathe, *ko hyevānyāt, kaḥ prānyāt*. In fact it is the very body of Brahman as it were, *ākāśa-śarīram brahma*, whose nature is Delight, *ākāśa ānanda*. In a sense, we can say that it is the very Nature, the unmodified Prakriti of all existences, not the insentient Prakriti of the Sankhya system, but the Conscious Prakriti of the early Vedantas. Still, the difficulty is not solved; for the question still remains whether what we call the elemental *bhūta ākāśa* is the same as what the Upanishads refer to as the Delight-body, *ānanda śarīram*, what we may call the Prakriti, the Substance, the material Cause, so to say, of all existences.

We must pause and look around to see what we mean by *bhūta ākāśa*, before we can find the right answer. Certainly, it is easy to state that Akasha is not this external visible Akasha, but the Inner, Spiritual, what is called *cidākāśa* that is meant by the term, for that is the Eternal Being, *sat, brahman*. But then, there is the danger of excluding the physical Akasha from being in any way related to the original Substance of Being. Besides, ordinarily our notion of Akasha is that we perceive space and that it is a void. Though such a conception is natural and inevitable, constituted as the human mind at present is, we can still appreciate the fact that our mind cannot conceive of space without a boundary, nor of boundary

## LIGHTS ON THE UPANISHADS

out space. This is because what we actually see is and not the formless space which is nothing but extension provided for differentiation in the beginning of things, an extension without which there could be knowledge of differences, formation of distinct objects or forces of contact. And this Extension itself initially and at first spiritual in character while in the immediate term for Manifestation it assumes a subtle psychological figure in the subjective and in the relative existence a grosser visual vastness imaging infinitude of the Eternal Being, Brahman. Nor is it extension in the Void; it is an extension in and of the substance whose real nature is Ananda, Delight of being and is present everywhere. Therefore Akasha is a term applied to Brahman as the source and substance of all existences. It includes the Akasha, the element of our gross conception, though the latter is just a respect of the Infinitude presented to the outward eye. Because it is all-pervasive and subtle to grasp yet impressive in a way and is the nearest image of the Physical of the Infinite, it is treated as synonymous with Brahman in those passages of the Upanishads where the source and support and substance of creation or manifestation of world-existence is mentioned.

Indeed the Akasha conception proves itself an effective means to predispose the mind to allow the Ideal or thought-vision of the Infinite to influence, penetrate and face it from many fronts, above, within, below and everywhere, so that the mind learns by

habit to sense the Infinite, as it were, even in some of its aimless and mechanical runnings. And in order that such meditations on Akasha shall not be a dull and dry affair, the Upanishad teaches that it is to be discovered within, in the heart of the living and the conscious, in the deepest centre of one's being, in the small, *dahara*, *ākāśa*. But it takes care to say that though this *ākāśa* is stated to be small, *dahara*, to the outward mind trying to draw inward, it is really as great as this vast *ākāśa* outside; it is Bhuma, *yavan vā ayam ākāśaḥ tāvān eṣontar hr̥daya ākāśaḥ*.

Now that we have an idea of Brahman the *ātman* and Brahman the *ākāśa*, we can proceed to the third term, Brahman the *prāṇa* to which reference has already been made. If *ātman* is the Sole Being, the Self-aware Spirit, *puruṣa*, and if *ākāśa* is the Substance, the Delight of Self-being, the sole essence of the All Existence, then *prāṇa* is the term applied to the active conscious element inherent in the *puruṣa*. Resting on the Self-awareness of the Spirit it acts on the Substance of Self-Delight and brings out the World-being in countless forms and spheres of the one Immense Existence, *sat*. Here a question may arise. Is it proper to extend the connotation of *prāṇa* to Brahman as the active Conscious Power inseparable from the Spirit? If so, what is the justification? For usually, by *prāṇa* we understand Vayu, the vital air, life-breath or life itself. And what do the Upanishads mean when they apply it to Brahman? Certainly they do not use it in the sense that because All is Brahman, *prāṇa* also is

Brahman. The word is used in a special sense to denote an aspect of the Supreme Truth, a function, if we may say so, of the Spirit that is the Supreme and the Self, an active principle by which the one Existence lends itself to the All Existence, the One Being turns into many becomings, the One Self radiates into many selves, the One Formless moulds itself into many forms.

If we examine the texts of the Brahmanas of which the Upanishads form the crowning part where the beginning of things, creation, is described, we invariably find an idea expressed in the same or similar way in these words : “He, the Sole Being, saw, *aikṣata*, He desired, willed, *akāmayata*, *aicchat*, that He might become the Many, *bahu syām*; tense in *tapas*, He created, *tapo tapyata asṛjata*.” By *tapas*, the creative incubation, He fashioned and hatched the Cosmic Egg, *brahmāṇḍa*. Again, we find it stated in the *Chhāndogya* : “By the life, *jīvena*, that is the Self, *ātmanā*, I shall enter into (these divinities) and manifest *vyākaraṇāni*, Name and Form”.<sup>1</sup> Here, it is by the

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<sup>1</sup> Chhāndogya Upanishad VI. 3. 2.

जीवेन प्राणधारणकर्त्रा आत्मना

is Shankara's commentary. He does not avoid the sense of life, *prāṇa*, attached to *jīva*. In the context, the Upanishad speaks of the agency by which the Self effects the manifestation of name and form. Therefore *jīvena ātmanā* means *jīvabhūtena prāṇabhūtena ātmanā*, by the Self that is the *prāṇa* or by the Self as the *prāṇa*, creation takes place. It is necessary to note here that the Upanishad when it uses the word *jīva*, is not thinking of the individual soul

Jiva which is the same as *prāṇa* that the manifestation is effected. Thus we find that it is the Power of the Spirit, the active gaze of the Purusha, the *tapas*, which is the Self-contained Force of Consciousness, the Supreme Life that is the life of all lives that makes possible all activity and movement in the infinite field of the Indivisible limitless *sat*, Purusha. It is this principal aspect of Brahman which is termed *prāṇa* that is the efficient cause while *ākāśa* is the material, *upādāna kāraṇa*, of created Existence. For it is the dynamic factor that causes all manifestation and is indicated by various terms such as *cit-śakti*, Tapas, or the Supreme *prāṇa*. That *prāṇa* is not mere life but a Conscious Power is reiterated by mention made of it as Consciousness in these texts, *prāṇaḥ prajñatama* or *yā vai prajñā sa prāṇaḥ yo vai prāṇaḥ sā prajñā*—“What is Consciousness is Life, and what is Life is Consciousness.” Other texts declare that *prāṇa* (Vayu) is the Deity that never sets, *anastamita devatā*. That *prāṇa* or the Supreme Life is used in the sense of *tapas*, of Conscious Force which is creative and dynamic, will be still more clear from the famous hymn of Parameshthin in the *Rg Veda*—“That One breathed without air by the power of its own being”, *anid avātam*

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conceived variously as *aṇu*, atomic, *vibhu*, pervasive, *pratibimba*, reflection, *avidyopādhika*, conditioned in the Ignorance, *antaḥkāraṇāvacchinna* limited or confined to the mind-stuff, the inner instrument, of the philosophers of later times. It is the Self as *prāṇa* that is meant here, not the soul individual or universal.





are the Immortal *amṛtam* and whatever is other than the two is mortal. But the fact that they are in usage understood to be elements was recognised by the ancient teachers and the author of the Brahma-sutras had to clear the misconception and establish that even *ākāśa* and *prāṇa* as elements are created,<sup>1</sup> though he had earlier in the first chapter concluded that they were terms of Brahman as already explained.

We have so far dwelt on the three terms of Brahman that mattered not a little to the *upāsakās* of the Chhandogya branch of the Vedic learning. Put briefly, they are *ātman*, *ākāśa*, *prāṇa*—each is absolutely the Brahman, inseparable from the other two. It is the sole Supreme Reality that is at once Atman the Self-aware Being ; the Akasha Ananda, the Substance that is the Delight of Being ; the Prana which is variously termed Chit-shakti (Consciousness that is Force), Tapas, Creative Incubation, the Supreme Life of all that lives and becomes. The basic conception of Brahman, then, is that it is the One in the Three as well as the Three in the One and certainly corresponds to the later triple formula of Sat-Chit-Ananda.

This fundamental idea is sure to go some way in aiding us to appreciate the Prana Vidya with which we started. All those sadhanas taught in the Upanishads that take the life principle for the starting-point in the sadhana are covered largely by what is named Prana Vidya. Even as this Upanishad starts with

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<sup>1</sup> II. 1-7

Akasha in its grosser aspect as an image of the Infinite, so does it do with *prāṇa* as an image, however gross and dark and refractory, of the Supreme *prāṇa*, the Tapas in its highest form. For the Original *prāṇa* is the Supreme, founding its forms in the lower manifestation, supporting its own fragments, reflections or radiations in the living beings here, so much so that the Upanishads speak of two kinds of *prāṇa*. The *mukhya prāṇa* is the basis for individual life here, hence is called the Chief; all activities of the main life, of what we would call the sense-mind, are spoken of as *prāṇa*. For the Upanishad which starts with concrete objects in Nature using them as symbols for *upāsana*, it is easier to advise the use of any of the *prāṇas*—voice, seeing, hearing, all are termed *prāṇas* here—by special means known to the sadhakas of the age, for effecting their union with the *mukhya-prāṇa*, their Chief from which they branch out for their different functions. It is the *mukhya-prāṇa* which is the individual centre here of the Supreme *prāṇa*, that has to become its true image. The culmination of the Prana Vidya is the correct expression, the ideal formation of the Life Supreme in the individual that is at once a real reflection, a substantial figure, a canalised current, a focussed and focussing centre and vehicle in constant and conscious union with its Source, the Original and Omnipotent *prāṇa* of the Creative Self, the Tapas of Ishwara.

Though the scriptures do not give the actual method of the sadhana—and no book could ever give

the sadhana—one fact is quite obvious from the passages of the text which refers to a symbolic rite in connection with the Prana Vidya we are considering. There is a prayer here in *Brāhmaṇa* prose : “Thou art Strength (*ama*) by name ; ‘All this’ is, verily, at home in Thee ; for He is the Most Senior (pre-eminent) and Excellent, King and Overlord. Let him lead me to pre-eminence and supremacy, kingship and overlordship. Let me be ‘All this’.”<sup>1</sup> What is remarkable in this prayer is to be found in the last line. It throws light on the fact that the prayer is not conceived in a narrow sense ; it does not arise in the heart of a soul who is actuated by greed, impelled by passion for power and tossed by the dark and limiting forces of ignorance and egoism. Here ensouling the prayer, there is a will, a knowledge, a recognition that there is One who is the most senior, *jyeṣṭha*, the One who is the Excellent, *śreṣṭha*, who is the Sole real Sovereign and Overlord and it is His supremacy and overlordship that one prays for, for share and enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> And this is possible only when one realises that “all this” is for the enjoyment (food) for the One and lives in complete union with Him, the Sole Life, offering

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<sup>1</sup> Chhandogya V. 2. 6-7.

अमो नामासि अमा हि ते सर्वमिदं स हि ज्येष्ठः श्रेष्ठो राजाधिपति स मा ज्यैष्ठ्यं राज्यमाधिपत्यं गमयतु ; अहमेवेदं सर्वं असाति ।

<sup>2</sup> Vedanta Sutas IV. 4. 21

भोगमात्रसाम्यलिङ्गाच्च ।

To share the Bhoga of the Ishvara is legitimate and possible.

whatever he egoistically is, in order to become “all this” which is really for that Supreme’s enjoyment, like food.

That this is the spirit of the prayer becomes transparent to us from the Rik which is used immediately in the symbolic rite, for concentration and prayer—“Of Savitr Divine we embrace that enjoying, that which is the best, rightly disposes the all, reaches the goal, even Bhaga’s, we hold by the thought.”<sup>1</sup>

In the light of what has been stated about the profound character of *prāṇa* it is hardly necessary to strike a note of caution that the *prāṇa vidyā* should not be mistaken for *prāṇāyāma*, the breath-control or similar devices of the Yoga Sadhana of later times. It is idle to attempt to go back to a distant past and discover the exact form and details of the Upasanas of the Upanishadic teachers from whom we are removed by a space of two to three millenniums. Even when we grasp the spirit of these ancient teachings, it is unreasonable to suppose that we receive the substance in the same form—time cannot be annihilated that way. Nor is it necessary; for the spirit and ideas of these Vidya Sadhanas have survived, though in fragments forming the bases of many systems of practical value, of spiritual disciplines that have

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<sup>1</sup> तत् सवितुर्वृणीमहे वयं देवस्य भोजनम् । श्रेष्ठं सर्वधातमं तुरं भगस्य धीमहि ॥

Rig Veda V. 83. 1. (Translated by Sri Aurobindo)

come down to us in different forms suited to the changing conditions through the ages. But to know about these sadhanas is just to be informed of them and is at best a mental equipment and a preparation. When all is said, the fact remains that a definite entry into the sadhana, the awakening into the Spirit within, the actual building of the inner Life, usually begins only when one has a Satyakama, the teacher, to transmit the tangible secret and light the life within of the seeker or one happens to be a Satyakama, the disciple, whom the Gods looked upon with favour opening his eye of vision to the Supreme Truth.

The Upanishads, then, are not a book of dry knowledge, they are throughout moistened with the *rasa* of sadhanas inseparable from every aspect of the Truth that is aimed at severally or conjointly, for realisation. Of all the Vidyas of the ancient Vedantas, the *prāṇa vidyā* is the most powerful, for in the higher and wider reaches of the sadhana, it is Brahma Vidya, *par excellence*. It is the living Breath of the *puruṣa*, the Puisseance of the Creative Consciousness, the Power of the Sole indivisible Spirit that is the basis of the *prāṇa vidyā*; its aim is not *laya*, absorption, or going to the Beyond,—there are other sadhanas that aim at it—but the realisation and successful formation of the individual Life—a Life that carries out its function as the function of the Life Universal, having no divided Will of its own, but the One free Will and Tapas of the Ishwara, and extends its activity as part of the Life of the Supreme Spirit to a wider range, quite

naturally, in such a way that one can exclaim with Satyakama :

“If one were to tell this to a dried-up stump  
Sure, branches would shoot forth and leaves  
spring from it.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### SHANDILYA VIDYA

*“He should make the resolve”<sup>1</sup>*

THE *Chāndogya* Upanishad devotes a short section (III. 14) to a famous Sadhana of the early Vedantic seers, known as the *śāndilya vidyā*. *Śāndilya* is a teacher, cited several times as an authority in the Shatapatha Brahmana: there his ‘Agni’ is called *śāndila* as in the parallel instance of the *Kathaka Brāhmaṇa* naming the ‘Celestial Fire’, *svargya agni*, after Nachiketas. He is one of the great teachers of *agnirahasya*—what on the surface appears to be a fire ritual, but is clearly ‘The Secret of the Mystic Fire’ as the title itself suggests. It is here in the *agnirahasya* that we find the spiritual discipline associated with the name of *Śāndilya*. It is briefly noted in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (V. 6) with slight variation. But the *Chāndogya*, quite in line with the usual brevity and compactness of these texts, yet quite adequately and thoroughly, gives us an idea of the Vidya, quoting *Śāndilya* by name at the close of the instruction.

The opening sentence of the section contains the great affirmation of the Vedanta that All this is Brahman

<sup>1</sup> स क्रतुम् कुर्वीत ।





of certainty that "This is so, not otherwise", *evam etat na anyathā iti avicalaḥ pratyayah*.<sup>1</sup> A resolute will with a firm faith in one's future is indispensable for the sadhana to start with; for, the text says, it is the will, the resolve that is mostly the man, *kratumayaḥ puruṣaḥ*. Man's present life in the world is the expression of a resolve, the working out of a will to be and to live as he does. It is again the resolve made now that works out the will and shapes the future. Therefore one must make sure of what he is to be in order that he may find the means of realising it now in this earthly existence. For one can retain and enjoy the fruits of his achievement and maintain the stature he has grown to, after disappearance from the earth scene, *yathākratur asmin loke puruṣo bhavati tathā itaḥ pretya bhavati*. It is not to be supposed that the Upanishad teaches how best man can prepare for departure from this world. On the contrary, it states that the spiritual status attained by man on earth survives the close of his earthly life

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<sup>1</sup> This is from the commentary of Acharya Shankara whom I have followed in fixing the senses of doubtful words used in the text. Later on, in extending the connotation of certain terms, e.g. *prāṇa*, in *prāṇa-śarīra*, I have quoted the Sanskrit phrases of Shankara and given their English renderings. There is a distinct advantage in relying upon the most ancient of extant commentaries in such matters, especially for the elucidation of certain expressions in so far as they appeal to reason. Incidentally, we are enabled to judge how much ancient indigenous scholarship lends support to the line of exposition of these Vedantic Sadhanas presented here in the light of Sri Aurobindo's high esteem of the Upanishads and of his teachings in general.

and continues to be his in the after-life and that it is the achievement here that matters most and determines the condition of his future. Elsewhere the Upanishads emphasise that if one has known It here, then there is Truth for him (for he has truly lived), otherwise great is the spiritual perdition. Therefore the wise discern THAT in all beings and become immortals on departure from here (Kena Up. II. 5). With a slight variation the same statement is made in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV. 4. 14), the same emphasis is laid on knowing it, while here, *ihaiva santo vayam*. The question of an after-life, life in the other world is taken up to stress the continuance of the human soul (with all the essentials of the gains acquired in the life lived on earth) in other conditions of being, in other worlds of the Spirit to which it has journeyed. The Scriptures recognise the fact of death, the disintegration of the material body composed of the gross elements even in the case of those who have, while living in this world, realised the Immortal in the mortal, unaffected by or transcending all that is mortal. They also recognise the possibility that the physical body can become immune to death and disease and aging in the instance of one who gets endowed with a body re-formed by the Fire of Yoga—*yogāgnimayam śarīram* (Sveta. Up. II. 12). But the question the Upanishad is occupied with here is not how to sustain and prolong the integration of the component elements of the gross body, nor is it the control and conquest of the forces that bring about the mortality of the living

matter used as a vehicle and instrument of the ensouled mind and embodied life of the Person, the Purusha. The Upanishad does not apply itself to the problem of the physical mechanism meant and used for working out the potentialities of the Spirit housed in and yet presiding over the gross and organised substance of what we call the material body. It concerns itself with the subject of man's realisation of his true Being, and its relation to the ultimate Truth, Brahman, while living on earth. Indeed, it is understood that the physical life is not the sole life and that the human soul does not end with its end, but continues its existence in another state of consciousness, in another plane of being corresponding to the condition and level of being it has risen to in the terrestrial existence. If man is to survive the physical death with a spiritual status, he has to establish in himself in the period of his bodily life on earth, points of contact with the higher powers of the Spirit, must have awakened and opened in him the subtle psychic and spiritual centres of knowledge and will communicating with the higher planes of being in other fields of Consciousness, in the supra-physical and still subtler and higher worlds that are the constituents of this Cosmos. For, thus and not otherwise, when the hour comes for the material body to fall or when the physical life has no further use for the Spirit, he can switch on to the light of his highest level, betake himself to the escalator of the Yoga Force that gives him the lift to those regions of the Spirit with which he has already familiarised himself

in a way under conditions obtaining in embodied life on earth. This is a general law that holds good even in the case of one who has chosen—rather who is chosen for—the way of dissolution or absorption, *laya*, in the Being or a return to the Beyond that is absolved from all relations and conditions of being anywhere in the created existence. For the question of the states of the soul and survival does not arise at all in the case of one to whom realisation of Brahman is the absorption where he is, in the Absolute, and the very thought of this world or the next is out of question. But the man in whom the fire is not kindled for a life of the Spirit, gropes in the dark after death, revelling in things he ran after in embodied life; but only he who is able to *know* before the fall of the body is competent for a subtle and spiritual embodiment in other worlds (*Katha* VI. 4).

It is precisely to draw the aspirant's attention to the necessity of discovering his connection with the deeper truths of his own being, of contacting himself with the innermost Truth, the Spirit, of forging and fashioning the link between himself, the outer man, and the deeper and larger powers of Consciousness and Force of the true Self, that the Upanishad formulates in a few words the substance and frame of connected ideas that have to mould and govern his attitude in the application of his will for the purpose in question.

In any attempt to seize the spirit of the language of these texts it is necessary to bear in mind certain features that are characteristic of these early Upa-

nishads. The words and phrases used in these passages are surcharged with an irresistible force of implicit reasoning and power of direct appeal to the aspiring soul of man. It is an astounding fact—and this can hardly escape the notice of the student of the Upanishads—that they often neglect the etymological sense of well-known names and terms, such as *Indra*, *Satya*, *Sāman*, and give their own interpretation in order to drive home the truth they have set themselves to deliver to those for whom they are intended. Or, they make a symbolic use even of the component sounds of a single syllable, as in the case of AUM, or construct new phrases, to suggest meanings packed with serious and profound thoughts and present to the perceiving mind vivid images of the Truth. The sentence declaring the celebrated Vedantic dictum with which begins the section we are considering affords a sovereign illustration of the liberty that the Upanishad takes in minting a phrase for making the Indefinable Brahman definite in idea to our intelligence. “*Taj-ja-lan*” is the new coinage used to describe Brahman as That (*tad*) from which All is born (*ja*, part of the root *jan*), in which All is absorbed (*la*, for *laya* of root *li*), and in which All breathes (*an*, to breathe, live). We may note in passing the strange remark of some reputed translators that these are mystic syllables. While these scholars give the right interpretation of the word following the ancient Sanskrit commentators, their own remark does not improve but mystifies it; there is nothing mystical about the expression ‘*tajjalān*’ as has been

shown above. There is, indeed, an archaic freedom quite manifest in the formation of the phrasing, but the etymology is correct. The economy evident in the structure of the word lends a symbolic colour, almost a symbolic value to the condensed expression which wears a mystical appearance. That is so, because the Upanishad here suggests to the mind with a revealing power of Truth an idea that drives to the core and shapes the thought vision encompassing the All and each in Brahman and as Brahman,—or an idea that fills the mind with a definiteness that All is born, breathes and is dissolved in That—Brahman.

*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma;  
Tajjalān iti śānta upāsita.*

To return to the text : it is true that All and each of the All, things, forces, forms and beings in this world or elsewhere are Brahman. If one realises this truth, certainly he can be tranquil in his worship of Brahman as such, since there is nothing to disturb the tranquillity. For, when one sees that everything is Brahman, the question of attraction or repulsion, desire or disgust does not arise to unsettle the calm of the being, the peace of the soul. But how to *know*, to realise It, to make It a truth of life, a fact of living experience is the problem. If Brahman is the One that forms and presents itself as the Many and is present in the Many, surely man can realise it by realising the whole truth of any part of the One, any one of the Many. While

it is always possible for Brahman to reveal its truth to man from anywhere in the outer world as everything is Itself, the direct and comparatively easier line open to him is to go inside and discover the truth of himself, the truth of what he is as an embodied being here and what he could become as related to the Power of the Spirit that has shaped his present and to the One Brahman and the Self in the many of which he is one.

Brahman does not present itself as the All, as if by chance or magic without order; the sole Supreme Reality does not become the Many without a method. Because It is the supreme Existence, the One Consciousness and Force, the Self which is the illimitable reservoir of all Knowledge and all Power, all processes proceed from that Intelligence, all methods are worked out by that Power, all the worlds are built and graded levels of Creation and layers of our being formed in and of the Substance and Force of that Conscious Being—Brahman. This Truth is summarily hinted and kept in the background; for the Upanishad has an eye on the practical value of the Truth, on that aspect of the truth that shows man as he finds himself to be in this world of Matter. He is an embodied being centred in between the innermost part, the core of his being, and the most outward expression; he is a mental person with a living body for instrumentation on the surface of this world-existence. For the purpose of the sadhana, our text starts with the utmost state and principle of development that man has arrived at and

treats him first as an individualised Spirit leading him on to realise his right relations with the outward parts of his embodied being on the one hand, and on the other his true nature and relation with the All Being, the All Power, the Sole Self that penetrates into and embraces and transcends the All.

*Manomayah puruṣaḥ*

The sadhana, then, begins straight with man, the mental being, whose position lies midway between the two extremes, the pure self-existent conscious Being and the inert inconscient Matter of which the gross body is made. The physical body is an obvious fact of life overwhelming the gross intelligence so much that it appears to be the sovereign basis and substance with life and mind included in it as its own product or by-product having no other ground or right of being independent of the material stuff. This coarser view holds good and is valid for the animal life and sensational mind; but to the deeper, finer and elevated side of man, the Upanishad presents a larger and higher view, correcting the lower standpoint that no longer applies to the mental man closely allied to, reflecting and acting for the Spirit. Man, teaches the scripture, is Purusha, Spirit, an individual, encased in the mind, as it were, mostly mentalised, *manomaya*. Whatever else he may be in the inner existence or in the outward movements, his centre of being as he finds himself now is characteristically



mental. For mind, the instrument of thought, is the highest and the most developed part of Nature he is endowed with. Thus, he is first mental in nature, enclosed in life by which the material body is animated and functions in the outer existence. If mind is closer to the Purusha, and a finer principle in Nature, what is its true function, its true character ? The *manas* of the Manomaya Purusha in the Upanishads does not connote the same thing as it does in the later works. It is not a jumble of feelings and passions, desires and sensations, or even a sheer repertory of thoughts. It is, certainly, an instrument of thought and expression : but in its true part it is a calm, transparent, reflecting apparatus receiving and transmitting truths and true ideas shaping them into thought-forms, translating them into its own terms. When it reflects the desires, passions and other activities of the lower life, they are mentalised, and are reflex actions which do not really form part of the true character and function of the mind. That is why some later Upanishads speak of mind being twofold : the one is higher, *param*, and pure, *suddham*, naturally calm; the other is the lower, *aparam*, and impure, *asuddham*, soiling the mirror of mind with desires etc., screening its natural purity and quietude from being effective. When we consider the question of mind which is essentially calm in its pure nature, we can well appreciate the yogic disciplines that lay stress on the necessity of stilling the mind which would be an impossibility but for the presence of a natural calm in some essential

part of mind itself. Incidentally we may remark that this truth of yogic psychology is a standing challenge to some of the popular theories of modern Science that hold that an uninterrupted flow of thought is an essential characteristic of mind, which is the very opposite of quietude. Needless to say that this is not valid in the light of yogic experience. Such is the mind that encases the *puruṣa*.

### *Prāṇa-śarīrah*

But the mental person, *manomaya puruṣa*, is embodied in life, *prāṇa-śarīrah* (lit. one whose body is life, *prāṇa*). It is necessary to note the significance of this statement, especially in view of the fact that the physical body is left out of consideration; for the latter is just a framework of *prāṇa* acting on matter, and the durable subtle body which can live independent of the physical is the *prāṇic* body of the *manomaya puruṣa*. Though the *prāṇa-śarīra* can move and act without the material body, it uses the latter for its expression in the physical world. What we call the activity of the body is only a part of the *prāṇic* force. It is the *prāṇa* that embodies the *manomaya puruṣa*, while the physical body is just an outer instrument dependent on, and in fact, built and shaped by the *prāṇa* which is the true vehicle for the mental Spirit; or, in the words of another text (*Muṇḍaka* II. 2-7), the mental person is the leader of the *prāṇic* body, *prāṇa-śarīra-netā*. It must be noted that *prāṇa* is not merely a force of life,

but a body formed of the substance of the Life-world; for there is substance variously constituting the worlds of Matter, Life, Mind and still other higher and subtler principles of creation. What is the character of the *prāṇa*, of which the subtle body is formed and led by the mental *puruṣa* ? The *prāṇa*, like the mind, in the Upanishads has a larger connotation; it is not life-force alone as in later religious philosophies. In its origin, as well as in its purer form embodying the *puruṣa*, it is Consciousness-Force as is taught in some texts. Here it is a body, an instrument and vehicle in which is condensed a double force, the twin-power of knowledge and action, *vijñāna-kriyāśakti-dvaya-sammurchitaḥ*, as the ancient commentaries explain. If the mental *puruṣa* is endowed with such a life-body—a concentrated subtle mass of Consciousness and Force, what is it that degrades it in its actual functioning as we understand it ? Just as the mind has a higher level, an inner layer, which is pure and calm and transparent enclosing the *puruṣa*, the *prāṇa* also has a higher and purer part that embodies the mentalised Spirit, while the lower and impure is riddled with desires, thirst and hunger of different kinds and their consequential activities that disfigure the true and splendid expression of the higher *prāṇa* in its pristine purity. *Prāṇa* is essentially the dynamis of the Spirit. If mind is an instrument of thought, expressive of knowledge, *jñāna*, *prāṇa* is an instrument of action, more truly, an instrument for the expression of the Spirit's will in action. In the embodied being it is active,

placed between the material body and mind, links and helps them in their functionings. As has been already stated, the *prāṇa* is not a mere life-force that moulds and carries out the functions of the body as a whole and its organs, but is a subtle body, *lingātma* of the *puruṣa* who is mostly mentalised while retaining in a way his self irrespective of the life-body or mental case which he uses for working out the Truth-Will, *satya-saṅkalpa*, of the Self to which our text presently refers.

### *Bhārūpaḥ satya-saṅkalpaḥ*

We have so far spoken of the *puruṣa* in the human being as mental in nature and embodied in life. What is the form and character of that *puruṣa* himself? Light is his form, *bhā-rūpaḥ*, says the Upanishad. In other words, this Purusha is a soul, having a form which is Light. Or, as another text of this Vidya has it, "Light is his Truth", *bhās-satyaḥ*. The scripture sets at rest any doubt that may arise in regard to the meaning of the word, *bhā-rūpaḥ*, by making it clear that Light is not a fanciful figure, though it is often used as a symbol of knowledge, as also a figure of Truth. A figure and symbol it is, but a living symbol so figuring the Spirit, Purusha, that it is visible to an inner vision; for Light-form is visible as all forms are, though the visibility is confined to the range of the inner vision.

This Purusha as Light, as a form of the Spirit, should not be mistaken for the formless Self. An individualised

Spirit, he is a soul-formation for embodied existence, willed and effected by the Self of all selves. To say that the Spirit, this Purusha is *bhā-rūpaḥ*, has a form of Light and is visible to the inner sight may at first scandalise the dialectic intelligence of the Vedantin; but it must be borne in mind that it is the soul-form that is light which is visible and not the Self, not the Atman that *sees* and makes others *seen*. The Purusha is luminous, his Will is the Truth-Will, i.e., the Truth in its aspect of Will; he has no desires apart from the desires of the Truth Being that manifest themselves through the True Will of the Ishvara, his Lord and Self. What we call the human desires are not those of this luminous Soul, the Purusha, but are part of the lower workings and coverings of the Prana, smokes over the flaming force of Will of the Purusha, and they dim and distort the True Will, running in a vicious circle until they learn the futility of straying away from the unfaltering lines of the Truth-Will and the Truth-Idea in the active gaze and disposition of the supreme Self. Whatever Desire there is in him, in this Soul, is a true Will that knows no failure, *satya-saṅkalpa*; for it is the True Will transmitted to the *manomaya puruṣa* from the Self who is spoken of as Akasha-Atman, in order to denote the all-pervasive and immanent nature of the Divine Being, the Self of the individual. The true Desire, *satya-kāma* or true will, *satya-saṅkalpa* in the *puruṣa* is covered by the outer impurities and falsehood, *anṛtāpidhānāḥ*, and without understanding the true Desire which is resplendent with the glorious

power and light of the true Self within, men are ordinarily carried away by false desires, *anṛtena pratyūḍhāḥ* (*Chāndogya* VIII. 3).

### *Ākāśatma*

Then we come to the question of Atman, what our text calls "Akashatma". He is the original Eternal Being of whom the mental purusha is an emanation, a soul-formation of the Spirit, or a ray of the Truth-Sun, a spark of the Divine Fire, *agner visphulinga*, as some texts have it. He is the creator of All, *sa hi sarvasya kartā*; all work, the work of the whole creation is His, *sarvakarmā*; all true desires are His, *sarvakāmā*, because His is the sole unfaltering will by which they are fulfilled. The universe as a whole, every part of it and each detail in it, all beings, all souls, all bodies and their organs are in him and for him, *sarva-gandhaḥ, sarva-rasaḥ*. With the utmost care and interest expressed in this stupendous work of the World-creation, he encompasses the all, *sarvam idam abhyattaḥ*; notwithstanding all this, he remains in Himself, Silent, *avāki* (literally speechless), and stays unconcerned, *anādarah*.

This Atman who is too subtle for comprehension like the Akasha is everywhere present, the universal Being, the Creator who constitutes the worlds and beings and directs them and their forces. He is at the same time awake in the heart of things, seated within in the deepest depths, in the heart of man, *antar hṛdaye*.

Silent and unconcerned, yet he is the Divine Being within transmitting this Truth-Will to the luminous soul of the mental person, *manomaya puruṣa*, embodied in the *prāṇa*, for its realisation and expression in the outer existence. He is smaller, *aṇīyān*, than the smallest we can perceive or conceive of. He is the Divine in the heart of every creature, the Divine as the Individual but not a finite Being although he founds Himself in the limited and the conditioned existence, and supports the individuality as the Individual. For this self-differentiation, the self-limiting itself is an expression of the all-seeing Power of His Infinite Being. He is greater, *jyāyān*, than the Earth, the Sky, the High Heaven and all other worlds, greater and vaster than the greatest and vastest of our comprehension. Both as subtle or small, *aṇuḥ*, and great or large, *mahān*, he transcends our understanding. He is therefore the Beyond, the Transcendent, the Atman, who is also the Universal Self and Godhead of all existence and in all creatures, and is yet the same Self, the Self of my being, *eṣa me ātmā*, the Divine Master of my individuality whose Truth-Will constitutes the poise and attitude of the Purusha encased in the mind with *prāṇic* body for action and expression in the vast field of this created Existence.

In calling upon us to worship Brahman as the All, the source and substance and support of the All, the Upanishad at the very start, as we have seen, rightly stresses the need for a sublime calm to be maintained in the worship, *śānta upāsīta*. But this calm,

which forms an essential limb of the worship is not the supreme Peace, *parā śānti*, which itself is a realisation, an achievement in the sadhana. A settled quiet of the mind, a certain poise and peaceful disposition of the being, aloof from the common distractions of life and its interests is all that the Upanishad means by *śānti* as a condition of the *upāsanā*. This is so, because the worship which implies concentration on what is worshipped would not be possible in the face of other objects of interest overpowering the mind with their claim to be enshrined in the quietude and disturbing the poise of the being. When one's interest is ardent, intense and sufficient, no effort is needed for concentration; there is an effortless focussing of the attentive seeings and thinkings on the object of adoration, a free concentration, a spontaneous gathering of all feelings and thoughts opening to the realisation of the Truth, of the subject meditated upon or the object worshipped. Therefore to be possessed of an ardour and keen interest is indispensable for any sadhana. But even sufficient interest may prove futile in the absence of right conception and correct attitude to justify and reinforce the strength of the interest. It is for that purpose that the Upanishad places before man his true position in relation to his embodied existence here as well as to his origins in the Brahman, who is the Self higher and larger than all the worlds, yet Immanent, the Self of the Universal, and who is also the Self in man, the True Individual. If man chooses to realise his true nature and get restored to the exalted place he is entitled



to as his spiritual and divine heritage, Brahman, the Ishvara in the heart as his own Self is watchful and waits for the hour.

But is there *choice* for man ? Is he *free* to make up his mind one way or the other ? Whatever may be the ultimate character of a free choice or free will, it is an undeniable fact—this is a truth of practical importance in life—that man has a sense of freedom, feels free to make his choice in certain spheres of thought and action, though his freedom may not be unchecked and absolute or his choice always right or fruitful. Therefore as a practical step, it is a prerequisite of the sadhana that man must make up his mind to have a clear conception of the Truth and choose his line. For he can choose the common run and be bound to the routine of ordinary life and think that he is dust and to dust he returns. Really, there need be no choice at all in the case of one who has not emerged sufficiently from the murk of animal life and lower mind with their ignorant, impure and false workings—desires and passions, crude impulses and instinctive grabblings at things small and low and brutish that effectively cover the higher thought-mind and cloud the light of Truth in the human Spirit. The choice, then, is possible and necessary for the man in whom the inner and finer parts close to the Spirit, the *puruṣa*, are developed enough to be dominant factors, arisen to the heights befitting him, the mental being.

Even so, the aspiring man can choose any line, for there are many lines of spiritual life leading to

the goal as envisaged and chosen by the aspirant. One can envisage the Truth, as Pure Existence, *sat*, and discover the road to reach it; one can conceive of it as Non-being, *asat*, and find the appropriate path; one could start with the faith that all creation is myth, *mithyā*, and nothing but Name and Form, and by emptying the mind of all ideas and names and forms, making it a sort of *śūnya*, could arrive at the acme of perfection in what is called the path of “*neti, neti*” (not thus, not thus). These negative methods of approach by reducing or renouncing the activities of life and rejection of thoughts are powerful in their own way and hit the aim, when successful. But most of the sadhanas, especially the Vidyas of the *Chāndogya* advocate the positive method, choosing one aspect or other of the Truth to start with, culminating in the attainment of Brahman, *sampad*, as it is termed in the *Brahmasutras* (IV. 4. 1); the latter’s conclusions are based on the *Chāndogya* text which conceives of the goal in terms of a positive attainment, *sampatti*. “I shall become, I shall attain” (*abhisambhavitāsmi, sampatsye, sampadye*), are the terms often used in the text. This affirmative statement in regard to the crowning stage of the sadhana, is the positive counterpart of the negative term, *mukti*, release from sorrow and suffering, or liberation from the bonds of the world of Ignorance. What we have to bear in mind in this context is that though *mukti*, liberation, is the *sine qua non* for a solid spiritual attainment, it is a negative conception of which the purpose is achieved

in the achievement of *sampat*—a positive state and goal, arrived at by positive methods on which stress is laid in the *Chāndogya* Upanishad guiding the author of the *Vedānta Sūtras* to conclude with the goal of *īśvara*, *saguna brahman* of the later Vedantins.

The Vidya we have been considering in this short discourse is one of the renowned sadhanas that employ positive methods of approach to the ultimate Reality in its relation to the human being. The feature that distinguishes it from other sadhanas lies in the fact that it is comprehensive in its survey and presents a synthetic view of man as a whole. Man is called upon first to recognise that he is Spirit, *puruṣa*, really superior to mind and life, not to speak of the body, and live in that truth, look and act on that basis. He is not to renounce the mind that is nearer to the *puruṣa* and encases him, but to maintain it in its pristine purity that it may reflect the Truth and receive the Truth-Knowledge; nor is the life that embodies the mental person to be rejected, but to be kept free from the impurities that clog, for the true expression of the Will in action. The *puruṣa* is neither mental nor vital in his essential nature, but a luminous soul, with a true Will : even as this soul is an emanation or formation in Nature of the Divine, the Lord and Self in the core of the being and as such one with that Consciousness, this Will also is one with the Will of the Lord aglow in the Heart. Man has to renounce nothing, as he has nothing to renounce, for the mind and life and body are in their own kinds parts of the Universal;

the soul itself is a ray and form of the Supreme Being. The only thing he has to renounce is the notion and sense and feeling that he is somebody independent and apart from others, and has the right to possess things which in reality are forms and substances and qualities of the Supreme Being, Brahman, as the Lord of the Universe.

When man realises that it is the misuse of an innate capacity by which he identifies himself with what he is not or what is not his that leads him to the wrong end and proves false to his true being, when he discovers the necessity of learning and learns the right use of his native power of identifying himself with the Spirit superior to Matter and Mind and Life and discerns the true Will, allows nothing to intervene between himself and the Truth-Will, when he makes way and the passage is clear for the Soul to radiate and manifest the Truth-Consciousness of the Self, then there dawns the realisation—"Verily, All this is Brahman"; even what he calls his mind, his life, his soul, his will are not his in the ego-bound personal sense, but are individual receptacles, channels, centres, power-houses of the All Mind, All Life, All Soul, All Will of the One Supreme; it is no longer the human soul, *jīva*, that is endowed with mind and life and the rest, but it is He who is the adorable and adored, the True Individual, the Soul, the Light of Truth, encasing Himself in the Mind and sheathed in Life for His own purpose in this Cosmic manifestation.

This is the famous Shandilya Vidya of the Upa-

nishads; this is the prime necessity it urges upon the *upāsaka* that once he recognises this Truth, then he should proceed with certitude and faith—“He should make the resolve, *sa kratum kurvīta*”.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VAISHVANARA VIDYA

*“In all worlds, in all beings, in all selves  
he eats the food.”<sup>1</sup>*

IN high terms the Upanishad describes the glory of the Sadhanas, called *vaiśvānara-vidyā* and therefore of the sublime status in realisation of one who adopts this line and worships Brahman as the *vaiśvānara ātman*. It is true that all the sadhanas of the Upanishads lead to and converge in the attainment of Brahmic realisation; but the starting-points differ, the lines of approach vary, the results seen on the way in the working out of the sadhana may be diverse and the ultimate realisation itself, essentially one, is distinguished with a certain stress on one or other aspect of Brahman. For the One Brahman in its immense Reality stands over and above the All even as It does behind the All, presents itself in its countless features in the multiple manifestation and is revealed, initially, in the particular aspect through which the approach is made as determined by the competence and tempera-

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<sup>1</sup> स सर्वेषु लोकेषु सर्वेषु भूतेषु  
सर्वेषु आत्मनसु अन्नम् अस्ति । (Chhandogya Up. V. 18. 1)

ment of the *sādhaka*. Thus we find the sadhana of Brahman as *vaiśvānara ātman* spoken of in the *Chāndogya* (V. 11-18) which we have chosen to enquire into in this brief discourse. We have a different version of the same *vidyā* in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* to which we shall have occasion to refer.

Who is the instructor of the *vaiśvānara vidyā* and whom did he instruct? What is the precise significance of the term *vaiśvanāra* as taught in the Upanishads? Is there any connection between the *vaiśvanāra* of the Upanishads and the *vaiśvānara agni* of the Rig Veda? In what respect do they differ? What is the character of this sadhana? Is it instruction or initiation? What is the fruit that results from the sadhana?

These are some of the questions we shall discuss here and before proceeding let us mention the context as stated in the *Chāndogya*.

“Who is our Self? What is Brahman?” This enquiry seized the minds of five men who were great householders well-versed in the Vedic learning. They agreed upon a decision to approach the well-known Uddalaka Aruni with a request to grant them Knowledge of *vaiśvanara ātman*. When they came to Aruni, the latter realised that it would be difficult for him to answer all their questions, to clear all their doubts, and pointed to another source, offered to accompany them to king Ashvapati Kaikeya who was known to be an adept in the *vaiśvānara sādhanā*. He was a king in whose realm there was no thief, no miser, no drun-

kard, none neglected the Fire worship, none was ignorant or unchaste, man or woman. Such was the efficiency and benevolence of his administration. Yet he was renowned for his Wisdom, for his Knowledge of the *vaiśvānara vidyā*. This shows, we may note in parenthesis, that Brahmic wisdom is not opposed to activities of life in the world ; or, this is a fine earlier illustration of the oft-quoted line of the Gita “Yoga is skill in works”. Then the king welcomed with due respect the Brahmins led by Uddalaka, offered to give them presents at the ensuing sacrifice he was to perform, and requested them to stay on. But on learning the object of their visit, he was pleased to instruct them and asked them to come next morning. He was pleased, as Shankara remarks, because of their humility and of their craving for knowledge from a *Kṣatriya* who is lower to them in social rank. Next morning he called and questioned them separately, for the teacher must know what and how far the pupil already knows, so that he may proceed with further instructions.

‘Whom do you worship as the *ātman* ?’ was the common question that each one of them was asked and we shall state their answers in brief. Prachinashala, son of Upamanyu, worshipped Heaven, as the *ātman* ; Satyayajna, son of Pulusha, worshipped the Sun as *ātman* ; Indradyumna, grandson of Bhallavi, *Vāyu* : Jana, son of Sarkaraksha, *Ākāśa* ; Budila, son of Ashvatarashva, the Waters ; Uddalaka, son of Aruna, worshipped the Earth as *ātman*. Apparently satisfied



with the several answers of the pupils, the teacher said in effect : your worship is all right as far as it goes and indeed yields certain benefits too ; but the Heaven, the shining brilliance, *sutejas*, is only the head of the *ātman*, the Universal Being ; the Sun is just the Eye, the *Vāyu* is but the Breath, *Ākāśa* is the Body, the Waters are the Bladder, the Earth is the Feet of the *ātman*, the Universal Being. If you had not come to me, those limbs in you would have withered or blown off which correspond to the parts of the *ātman* which you worship mistaking severally each part for the whole.<sup>1</sup> Thus the teacher corrects the wrong notions of the *vaiśvānara ātman* entertained by the disciples and proceeds to point out positively the way of worshipping the Universal Person, for this *ātman* is *puruṣa*, not a mere all-pervading existence or being.

How is He, this *Vaiśvānara*, to be conceived and worshipped ? Heaven and Earth, it is said, are the head and feet, Sun is the eye, Wind, *Vāyu*, is the breath, the infinite Extension *Ākāśa*, is the body and the Waters are the wealth, *rayi*, of the universal *puruṣa*, the *vaiśvanara ātman*. Then, are we simply to

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<sup>1</sup> Here Shankara's commentary reminds us of the popular maxim of the blind men and the elephant—*hasti-darśane iva jātyandhaḥ*. Certain blind men wished to have an idea of the shape of an elephant. Touching the trunk one thought that the elephant was like a snake; another caught hold of a leg and supposed that he resembled a post and so on. This maxim is often used to illustrate the error of mistaking a part for the whole.

put these parts together for a correct conception of the whole ? Could that be a real and effective help in the worship of *Vaiśvānara* ? We can, indeed, form for ourselves an idea of the vastness of the Universal *puruṣa* as one having for head the Heaven, the top, the summit of this creation ; for his feet, the Earth, the bottom, the support from below ; and in between the vast Extension for his body and so on. But that would be a symbolic representation of the immense universal *ātman* in a measure of space. Besides, parts pieced together cannot form into a living soulful whole. It is the Spirit, the Self in all these things that brings them into being, allots their place in the plan of creation, makes a whole of them and gives them their value in His own Cosmic embodiment. Therefore they are not to be ignored, but it is the *ātman* that is to be worshipped as dwelling in the Universal Being of which Heaven, Earth and the rest are the limbs, and these are, as has been said, but a measure in terms of space of the Immeasurable—*pradeśa-mātra*, a term used in the Upanishads with a double significance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Pradeśa* means in the context Heaven, Earth and the rest as the ancient commentators have explained, when we look at the Macrocosm as the body of the Universal Being; it can also mean a span which is said to be the measure of the *puruṣa* within, as seen from a subtle plane. Some texts declare that the flame of the *puruṣa* extends from above the navel regions to the heart above; while others speak of the *puruṣa* as the measure of a thumb—*aṅguṣṭha mātraḥ puruṣaḥ*. These are all valid in their own way as they were so seen and found to be effective in the sadhana by the sages of the Upanishads.

But how is the *ātman*, the Self, the Soul of universal Being to be worshipped and realised ? He is the Self of all these things, all creation. He is known as *abhivimāna*, the inner I behind each and all as explained by the commentator—*pratyagātmatayā abhivimiyate aham iti vijñāyate*. Therefore one has to realise Him in his own being as the Self before he can effectively comprehend and perceive Him as the Self of all selves and all creation. For as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (I.4) states graphically “*ātman* alone was all this in the beginning. He was in the form of a Person, *puruṣa*, He looked around and saw nothing else than Himself. He said ‘I am’ therefore His Name is I”.<sup>1</sup> It is the *ātman*, the *puruṣa*, who sees (*anu-vikṣya*) and creates himself (*sṛṣṭvā*) in the very act of the look and enters into (*anuprāviśat*) the Creation, into all things, all beings and all selves. Well has it been said that ‘The individual I and the universal I are one ; in each world, in each being, in each thing, in each atom is the Divine Presence, and it is man’s mission to manifest it’. (The Mother in *The Supreme Discovery*, p. 6.) And because the I of each and the great Universal I are one, one has to take the cue from his own self, the I which he knows or fancies he knows. For ordinarily what we take to be ourselves is a perpetual bubble of the I afloat on the super-

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<sup>1</sup> *Asmad*, the base of the first personal pronoun *aham* is derived by Sanskrit grammarians from the root *as* ‘to be’ (*Uṇādi* 144) so that the very word *aham* denotes the presence or existence of I.

ficies of our being, of our bodily life ; it is an incessant shade of the I thrown on the surface, on the waves of feeling and thinking and willing over the deep waters of our Self. Our true being is the Soul, the individualised Self whose light plays upon and supports and activates our separative existence in mental and bodily life. This superficial self is a shadow of the Soul, it is the ego figuring the Self ; however persistent, continuous and unceasing in its appearance, it is frothy, has no substance of its own but is there all through as a reminder of the constant Presence within of the Self which is the true import of the I. It is this Self which is within us established as our innermost Being that Ashvapati Kaikeya calls upon Uddalaka and others to realise as the *vaiśvānara ātman*, the Self that is the Universal Purusha. Not only does he instruct, but actually initiates them into the sadhana as we find it stated in the slightly different version of the *vaiśvānara vidyā* in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (X.6). Ashvapati convinces the pupils of the essential oneness, of the identity of the Macrocosm and Microcosm, explains the already declared parts in the external, in the Universal, as correspondences of those within, in the Individual, and finally leads them to the understanding of the central point of the teaching. 'I shall make you realise' (*abhisampādayiṣyāmi*), says Ashvapati pointing to every part (*upadiśan*), Head, Eye, Nose and others and affirms that each is indeed the *Vaiśvanara* but that He is in the form of a Person, *puruṣavidhaḥ*, this universal Fire, *vaiśvānara agni*,

firmly established within in man (*puruṣe antah pratiṣ-  
thitah*). ✓The Upanishads always give general instruc-  
tions, but they do not give the actual methods of the  
sadhana even when it is possible to find out the method  
from oral or recorded teachings, the actual and definite  
working out of the sadhana takes place only when  
the would-be sadhaka receives the help, the influence,  
the power from some source human or Divine or more  
truly from the Divine in the human. ✓This fact is  
plain from many texts of the Upanishads themselves,  
from passages such as ‘He knows who has a teacher’  
(*ācāryavān puruṣo veda*), ‘Thou art our father who  
leads us across the shore beyond ignorance’ (*tvam  
hi naḥ pitā avidyāyāḥ param pāram tārayasi*), ‘For  
this knowledge one shall approach the Guru’ (*tad  
vijñānārtham sa gurum eva abhigacchet*). The Guru,  
then, is the master who pours the influence into the  
competent vessel, and gives the start as well as the  
final touch to the sadhana in the disciple. For he is,  
in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “One who has risen  
to a higher consciousness and being and he is often  
regarded as its manifestation or representative. He  
not only helps by teaching and still more by his influ-  
ence and example but by a power to communicate his  
own experience to others.” And this is precisely what  
is meant when the Guru Ashvapati declares, *abhisampā-  
dayiṣye*, ‘I shall effect the attainment in you’.

And once the realisation of the Universal Self is  
there as the burning Fire, the Soul within one’s own  
being, its application extends, the Presence of the

same Universal Self in other selves, in all beings, in all existences. For all these are abodes of the *ātmān*; things and beings, living and sentient or apparently non-living and insentient are all *ātmān* as the Many. "Let me be born as the Many" (*bahu syām prajāyeya*); it is the will, the glance, the attitude of the *ātmān* that causes the creation and therefore He is first to be realised as the in-dwelling Fire in others also as in oneself. It is not to be supposed that the *ātmān* is really beyond all manifested existences and to realise Him one must go beyond using the worship of the Universal Soul as a means so long as one is in the Ignorance. That the *ātmān* is beyond and above all is perfectly true; but it is also equally true that the whole creation is the product of his Will, is the Home of his Presence, and in fact Himself as the One and All. It is not to be denied that this *ātmān* is one and above and beyond the All and is and can be so realised. That is an experience, the culmination of a different sadhana. But the *vaiśvānara vidyā* is concerned with the realisation of that *ātmān*—and who is in his own right what we may call the Transcendental—who has willed and become the many selves. He is to be worshipped, seen and felt as the Universal Being whose indivisible Presence dominates the all, the divided existences in the universe of all forces and things and beings and souls. But the divided existence, it must be noted, is at once an expression and veil over the undivided Self; hence each division is to be regarded as a part of the

divided whole and must not be overlooked. Ashvapati, then, instructs his pupils Aruni and others the art of living in accord with the truths of the *vaiśvānara*, the Universal Person. As the sustenance of the material body is indispensable for living, he enjoins upon them not to eat the food and live as if the *vaiśvānara ātmān* were something separate, but to eat—and eat for living—with the knowledge of Him the One Fire who lives aglow in all the creatures. Anyone who so lives, lives also for other souls, for other beings around, for the rest of the whole universe; for he lives not as a divided being separated in feeling and knowledge from the source of his existence, the Universal Person seated within him as in all others. He lives in conscious union with Him, lives a conscious life aware of the fact that what we call creatures are formations for the housing of the Great Presence of the Universal Fire, *Vaiśvānara Agni*. When he eats, he knows and feels that it is the awakened Fire of the Universal Person in him that eats. When he takes the substance of matter, he knows that it comes from the Universal Being. His living is a source of joy and power to the living of others, to the general progress of the world, of all beings, and of the human kind in particular that is closer to his level. Whether the others in the outer world know it or not, he radiates the rays of Wisdom, throws out waves of life-giving strength, emanates the concrete influence spontaneously exercised for the onward march of the soul's progress in others. Therefore other souls feel joyous and

satisfied when they are drawn to him.<sup>1</sup> The food he takes in is an offering to the Universal Fire in the vital mechanism of his being, *prāṇa-agnihotra*. This is the real meaning of the Fire ritual, and our text says (V. 24) that whoever, without knowing this, performs the ritual, pours his offering on the ashes removing the burning charcoal, *angārān apohya bhasmani juhuyāt*. But when one does the real Agnihotra, the offering to the Universal Fire, all beings yearn towards that true Fire sacrifice, just as hungry children surround their mother. In the Fire ritual of one who *knows*, all sins, continues the Upanishad, are like a tuft of reed burnt to ashes.

This, in sum, is the *Vaiśvānara Vidyā* of the early Vedantic seers. But there is one remarkable feature which distinguishes it from the other Vidyas mentioned in these scriptures. That this is one of the earliest Upanishadic Sadhanas directly drawing their inspiration from the hymns of the Rig Veda is certain without a shadow of doubt; and this will be clear from a careful perusal of the *Vaiśvānara* Hymns of the Rik Samhita.

It is not to be supposed that the other sadhanas and teachings are not based in some way or other on the spiritual teachings of Vedic wisdom. The thinkers and sages of the Upanishads have certainly drawn their

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<sup>1</sup> "He who so knows that, towards him verily all existences yearn", *sa ya etad evam veda abhi ha enam sarvāṇi bhūtāni samvāṇchanti*, so says the Kena Upanishad (IV. 6).



inspiration and support from the Hymns when they were engaged in developing their Self-culture for the realisation of the ultimate Truth, for conforming their lives to the laws of the Spirit, for the attainment of Brahmanhood while still living on Earth. In their endeavours, in their successes, in their conclusions, they often seek the support of the Vedic seers, though we may not always trace their names or find their hymns in the Samhitas that have come down to us; they make mention of certain verses presumed to be those of the Vedic seers though they are not traceable now; they actually quote the Riks also, but in their own sense and for their purpose though their meanings in the Rig-Vedic context may differ or may not be exactly the same. But living in an age far posterior to the Vedic epoch their method of expression is more intellectual and less symbolic and mystical than that of their Vedic forefathers. Even when they use Vedic symbols, they give them often different significances. The results of their explorings in the fields of the inner Life and Spirit, the truths of their intuitive perceptions, the means at their disposal and the lines they proceed along, the fruits of their labour in the occult and spiritual realms, are often implicitly, but in authentic tones, expressed in a language that is more intelligible to the mentality of our age and fairly far removed from that of the Rig Vedic Hymns. Thus we find that they do not record their discoveries and deliver their messages in terms which are too abstract and rarefied as are those with which later Indian Philosophies and Metaphysics

of the modern age have familiarised us. Nor do they employ the mystical language of the hoary symbolic age of the Vedas where concrete figures and images are in common currency. The Upanishads speak of the Self, *ātman*, Brahman and that is the supreme Being, the Creator, God—the God of gods and men and all existences. Even when they mention the Vedic gods, Agni or Vayu or Indra or Surya, these occupy subordinate positions, their functions are different, narrow and limited. But in the Vedas, the Gods occupy superior places, for each God retains his distinction and personality in the front, is himself the whole Godhead behind in the plenitude of his Cosmic and Supracosmic existence. This has been shown by Sri Aurobindo in his translations of and comments on the Riks; and the fact is on the face of it easily discernible in the case of Agni, the Divine Flame, who is the first and foremost of the Gods awakened or born in man. Agni becomes other Gods in his progress as the functions vary according to the needs that arise in the course of his developing puissance in the various stages of man's inner progress or in the rising tiers of creation in the Cosmic manifestation. That *Agni Vaiśvānara* is plainly hymned in the Rig Veda as *Sūrya* is a well-known instance (Rig Veda X. 88). While the Upanishads generally assign a lesser place to the Gods as psychological powers within us and as Forces of Nature, they give a high place to the *Vaiśvānara Agni* and mention Him as *ātman* which is the same as Brahman, the Supreme Being. The

*Śatapatha* text of the *Vaiśvānara Vidyā* mentions Him as Agni, and even though the *Chāndogya* does not expressly mention Him as Agni, it concludes with what is called the *prāṇa-agnihotra* to which reference has been already made. What exactly is meant by *Vaiśvānara*? It means the Universal Person or Soul and that is generally the accepted sense; but it also means One who is actively present in the Universe, in all things and beings, gods and men; and if we remember the radical significance of this Vedic term, it means the Leader within (*naraḥ*, *netā*) of gods and men, of the Universe and from within the Universe. Substantially the Upanishad also uses it in this significance, judging from the universal and spiritual character of the adjective *abhi-vimāna* used in the text to express the nature of the *ātmān* one is called upon to worship and realise.

What is the idea conveyed by the term *abhi-vimāna*? Deriving the word from *man* 'to know', some commentators have interpreted it, as has been already stated, to mean 'One who is to be understood as the Inner I.' But the word *vimāna*, wherever it occurs in the Rig Veda, is used in the sense of a word derived from *mā* to measure. Sayana invariably gives the same meaning to *vimāna*; either "measure", "limit", and "make definite" or "construct and create" is the sense attached to it—*rajaso vimānam lokasya paricchedakam*—'One who measures out and makes definite the world' (Rv. II. 40.3 Sayana). Or, *rajaso vimānaḥ lokasya nirmātā*, 'One who builds the world' (Rv.

IX . 14. Sayana).<sup>1</sup> But whether the word *vimāna* is taken to mean 'measure with distinction', *viśeṣeṇa mātā* or 'to build or create', *nirmāṇa*, it does not make any essential difference. For whatever is created is measured; measure itself is 'setting a limit to and making definite what is to be created'. Indeed creation itself is measured out of the Immeasurable—the Illimitable limiting itself to a part, the Inderterminate willing and putting forth an aspect Self-determined and Self-conditioned and bounded by the Boundless. That, indeed, is the import of *ātmān*, the Self who 'looked around, willed, created, became the many' as mentioned in many passages of the Upanishads.

There is another consideration which should weigh with us in determining the meaning of *abhivimānam* used as an adjective of *ātmānam* in the *Chāndogya* text. Even if it is taken to mean "One who is to be understood as the inner I" distinguished from the

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<sup>1</sup> The following are a few instances from Sayana in his commentary on the Rig Veda :

III. 26. 7. *Rajaso vimānaḥ antarikṣasya viśeṣeṇa mātā parichettā* (measurer).

III. 3. 4. *Vimānam agniḥ vimīyate anena phalam iti* (He is so called because the fruit is measured by him).

VI. 7. 6. *Vaiśvānarasya vimitāni cakṣaśā, nirmitāni* (built or constructed).

IX. 62. 14. *Vimāno rajasah kaviḥ lokasya nirmātā* (builder of the world).

X. 139. 5. *Rajaso vimānaḥ udakasya nirmātā* (creator of the waters).

X. 114. 6. *Yajñe 'n vimāya, nirmāya* (having constructed the Sacrifice).

other parts of the being, it need not be inconsistent with the sense of the *ātmān* who sees, measures and creates. But one cannot afford to miss the significance of the term *prādeśa-mātra* applied to *ātmān*. As already pointed out, it means that the *ātmān* is to be worshipped as *Vaiśvānara* who is of the measure of a span, or of the vast universe embracing Heaven, Earth and the Vast Extension etc., forming His Head and Feet and Body and the rest.<sup>1</sup>

If so, what is taught in the *Vaiśvānara Vidyā* is

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<sup>1</sup> Shankaracharya's explanation of *abhi-vimāna* is helpful in the sadhana for the realisation of the Pure I uncontaminated by the world-existence and obviously he does not take it in the Vedic sense of the word derived from *mā*, but takes it in the sense of 'to know'. But in his interpretation of *prādeśa-mātrā* he accepts the usual meaning of *matrā*, measure, a kindred of *māna* in *abhi-vimāna*, both of the same root. What is important is his alternative meaning of *prādeśa*; one is 'pertaining to the place' of Head, Feet etc. of *vaiśvānara ātmān* in the Heaven, Earth; another is in the sense of (*pra-adeśa*) command or instruction given in the text as regards the various parts of the *vaiśvānara ātmān* that is to be worshipped. Both these meanings are helpful to the sadhana of the *Vaiśvānara* and are more in consonance with the sense of *vimāna*, only if the latter is taken in the Vedic sense of the word. Note also that '*pradiś*' in the *pradeśa* is a Vedic word meaning 'to point out', 'to give out' or 'to command' or 'to instruct'. Vide *Sāyana's* commentary II. 12. 7 Rig Veda—'*yasya aśvāsaḥ pradiśi yasya gāvaḥ*' (*pradiśi pradeśane anuśāsane*): it means 'in whose command are the Horses (of Life-powers) and the Cows (the rays of Light)'. Or Rig Veda X. 110. 7—'*prācīnam jyotiḥ pradiśā diśantā*' (*prakāśena upadiṣṭena mārgena*)—*Sāyana*. Here the commentator takes the word to mean 'by the path shown'.

## Godhead, the Universal Person, the Divine Fire, *Vaiśvānara Agni*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is beyond our scope here to take up all the hymns of *Agni Vaiśvānara* in the Rig Veda to show the remote antiquity of the Upanishadic sadhana associated with his name. But reference to a few passages in the various Mandalas of the Rik Samhita would be helpful and go to show the spiritual significance and universal character of *Vaiśvānara*, hymned not in a stray instance, but systematically in Mandala after Mandala by seer after seer, giving out the same ideas, using the same technique of expression, often the same or similar terms, revealing the deep spiritual significance and perception of the grandeur, at once vast and sublime, of the universal Godhead, *Agni Vaiśvānara*.

‘He is the forehead of Heaven, the centre of the Earth; He is the centre of the people; He supports them like a pillar’. (I. 59.)

‘King of the worlds, taking birth He sees All this’. (I. 98. 1)

‘The messenger between Heaven and Earth (or the Inner messenger), urged by the Gods encompasseth the Vast Home with his splendid rays’. (III. 3. 2.)

‘Father of the Sacrifice, He is the *measure* of the seers and hymnists.’ (III. 3. 4.)

‘Thou, wide-seeing One, *Vaiśvānara*, Thou knowest the Swar (the realm of Light); at Thy birth Thou fillest the Earth and Heaven. With Thy Self Thou encompassed all the worlds’. (III. 3. 10.)

‘By birth I am *Agni* aware of all that is born...the *measurer* of the world.’ (III. 26. 7.)

‘Messenger of Earth, Head of Heaven, born in the Truth, Guest of men, Him the *Vaiśvānara*, the Gods have brought into being, a fit vessel.’ (VI. 7. 1.)

‘By the seeing brilliance of *Vaiśvānara*, by the Immortal’s light, the summits of heaven are *measured* (traversed through)’. (VI. 7. 6.)

‘*Vaiśvānara* at his birth in the Supreme Heaven...*measured* out the Vast Space (between Heaven and Earth).’ (VI. 8. 2.)

‘The mass of the Great Ones, *Vaiśvānara*, the ancient Cow (of Light) followed and discovered Him shining in the Truth, swift-moving in the secret Cave—*guhā*. (IV. 5. 9.)

This, then, is the *Vaiśvānara Vidyā* of the Upanishads. It is a sadhana that preserves the Vedic tradition of the Universal Godhead, the Divine Fire, awake in man as the Self of his self, vigilant, active, guiding him to universalise himself on the lower levels of Creation while he still lives in the world of Matter as an individualised mind and self; it starts with the conception, faith and will to recognise the active Presence of the *vaiśvānara ātman*, the Universal *puruṣa* in each living being; it progresses by the extension in thought, feeling and action of the individual to others immediately around, to whomsoever he sees and comes in contact with in his interchange with the environment, and indeed to all beings, to the world at large; it culminates in the realisation of the individual completely freed from the bonds that chain him to the separate and finite living matter and so identified with the Universal Divine Presence in himself, in all beings, in all worlds, that whatever he does is seen and felt as the doing of the Sole Self of the universe and indeed,

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‘Born in the Supreme Heaven, Thou (*Vaiśvānara*) like Wind, reachest at once the place (of the Gods)’. (VII. 5. 7.)

‘In the Parent’s bosom, in Heaven and Earth, *Agni Vaiśvānara* has found his excellent seat; all men take refuge in Him, desiring His favour (happy disposition)’. (VII. 6. 6.)

‘At Thy birth Thou fillest the Earth and Heaven’. (VII. 13. 2.)

‘Thou stoodst at the head of the world’. (X. 88. 6.)

‘Thou art the head of the world’. (X. 88. 5.)

‘The Gods brought Him into being and in Him they offered up all the worlds. He forms himself straight warming the Heaven and Earth with his flaming glow’. (X. 88. 9.)

## Godhead, the Universal Person, the Divine Fire, *Vaiśvānara Agni*.<sup>1</sup>

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‘Thou, wide-seeing One, *Vaiśvānara*, Thou knowest the Swar (the realm of Light); at Thy birth Thou fillest the Earth and Heaven. With Thy Self Thou encompassed all the worlds’. (III. 3. 10.)

‘By birth I am *Agni* aware of all that is born...the *measurer* of the world.’ (III. 26. 7.)

‘Messenger of Earth, Head of Heaven, born in the Truth, Guest of men, Him the *Vaiśvānara*, the Gods have brought into being, a fit vessel.’ (VI. 7. 1.)

‘By the seeing brilliance of *Vaiśvānara*, by the Immortal’s light, the summits of heaven are *measured* (traversed through)’. (VI. 7. 6.)

‘*Vaiśvānara* at his birth in the Supreme Heaven...*measured* out the Vast Space (between Heaven and Earth).’ (VI. 8. 2.)

‘The mass of the Great Ones, *Vaiśvānara*, the ancient Cow (of Light) followed and discovered Him shining in the Truth, swift-moving in the secret Cave—*guhā*. (IV. 5. 9.)



This, then, is the *Vaiśvānara Vidyā* of the Upanishads. It is a sadhana that preserves the Vedic tradition of the Universal Godhead, the Divine Fire, awake in man as the Self of his self, vigilant, active, guiding him to universalise himself on the lower levels of Creation while he still lives in the world of Matter as an individualised mind and self; it starts with the conception, faith and will to recognise the active Presence of the *vaiśvānara ātman*, the Universal *puruṣa* in each living being; it progresses by the extension in thought, feeling and action of the individual to others immediately around, to whomsoever he sees and comes in contact with in his interchange with the environment, and indeed to all beings, to the world at large; it culminates in the realisation of the individual completely freed from the bonds that chain him to the separate and finite living matter and so identified with the Universal Divine Presence in himself, in all beings, in all worlds, that whatever he does is seen and felt as the doing of the Sole Self of the universe and indeed,

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‘Born in the Supreme Heaven, Thou (*Vaiśvānara*) like Wind, reachest at once the place (of the Gods)’. (VII. 5. 7.)

‘In the Parent’s bosom, in Heaven and Earth, *Agni Vaiśvānara* has found his excellent seat; all men take refuge in Him, desiring His favour (happy disposition)’. (VII. 6. 6.)

‘At Thy birth Thou fillest the Earth and Heaven’. (VII. 13. 2.)

‘Thou stoodst at the head of the world’. (X. 88. 6.)

‘Thou art the head of the world’. (X. 88. 5.)

‘The Gods brought Him into being and in Him they offered up all the worlds. He forms himself straight warming the Heaven and Earth with his flaming glow’. (X. 88. 9.)

one with the Universal *puruṣa*, when he eats the food he eats the food in all worlds, in all beings and in all selves, “*sa sarveṣu lokeṣu sarveṣu bhūteṣu sarveṣu ātmasu annam atti.*”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE KATHOPANISHAD

*“If before the body drops down one has been able to apprehend (It) here, then is one fit for embodiment in the worlds (that are His creations).”<sup>1</sup>*

“DAY in and day out, millions of beings journey to the abode of Yama ; but those who are left behind desire to stay on here permanently as if they were exemptions privileged to evade their turns in the procession. Can there be a greater wonder than this?” exclaims Yudhishtira in the Mahabharata. But to Nachiketas of the Katha Upanishad Death does not seem to be a terror, nor men desiring to live and not to die, a wonder. For with courage and not fear he proceeds to the hall of Death and faces him ; and not with indifference or disgust but with a desire to come back to life he chooses the first boon. But terror or no, Nachiketas sees the other side of life, enters the house of Death, learns the secrets of the great passage, discovers the return path to life here, blessed indeed with Yama’s assurance of his personal identity for recognition by his father. And this is, really, the wonder ; for the Upanishad starts with a story which,

<sup>1</sup> Kathopanishad VI. 4.

feeling and serene in thought, and greet him back to life recognising him as the same Nachiketas. This was granted with the assurance that Gautama, his father, would recognise and with joy welcome the boy released from the jaws of death and would have sweet sleep. For the second boon he chooses the knowledge of the Celestial Fire—the Fire by which one goes to heaven where the soul rejoices, having crossed over sorrow and hunger, where there is immortality, no death, nor fear of old age. Yama grants this boon; for he expounds to him the nature of the Celestial Fire, for he *knows* it. He describes it as the possession of infinite existence, the foundation of all things and the thing concealed in the secret cave of our being. He told him of Fire, the world's beginning, of what the bricks are to him, their number, the manner of his building. Nachiketas repeated what he was taught. The Great One, *Mahātmā*, was pleased with Nachiketas and gave an additional boon saying that the Fire would be named after him and offered him a necklace of many figures. Now, Yama continues, “He that lighteth the three fires of Nachiketas and uniteth himself with the three and doth the triple works crosseth beyond birth and death for ever. Having known the God adorable, omniscient, Brahman-born, and, realising Him, one attains to surpassing peace.” “When one has the three Nachiketas and knows this that is triple and so knowing beholds the Nachiketas Fire, he thrusts from him the cords of Death and leaving sorrow far behind enters Heaven rejoicing.” The third boon is interesting,

for it is the question about death and the answer is still more interesting, not simple, but puzzling as we shall see on coming to that part of the discussion. This is the question, the third boon Nachiketas chooses. "There is this doubt that when a man has passed away, some say, 'he is' and some, '*this* he is not'. Taught by thee I would know this. This is the third of the boons." Yama asks him to choose another boon as the question about death is a riddle, even the gods debated this of old, the law of it is very subtle. But Nachiketas persists and refuses to take any other boon, resists all temptations—sons and grandsons blessed with longevity, horses and elephants, wealth, gold, lovely women, mighty country, happy life, untold treasures and pleasures of all kinds, offered by Yama. He is gratified to know that Nachiketas is single in his purpose and has with firm faith turned towards the path of Knowledge, of Truth; his choice of the Good and the Right and discard of the sweet is definitive, a positive proof of his competence to receive the Knowledge, the answer to his question. The rest of the whole Upanishad is an exposition of the answer, the great secret of true Immortality and the means of its attainment.

It is beside our purpose here to examine and expound all the passages of the text and arrive at the core of the teachings. Our object is to look into the nature of the three boons separately and show that they are not boons asked for at random or merely choices decided by the whims of the boy while he was face to face with death. Ordinarily we are accustomed

## LIGHTS ON THE UPANISHADS

ask that it is the third boon which is the most important and treat the first two not with as much care and attention as they deserve. In fact if one misses the significance of the first and the second, he can rest assured of his failing to grasp the import of the third—the question about death. In the first instance the first boon is curious; if we understand it aright, the way is paved for following the trend of the Upanishad. For no one who is serious will attach importance to a story part of the Upanishad as an actual occurrence; not that it is not possible that there was one Nachiketas who performed a sacrifice in which he gave away all his possessions, and irritated by the repeated requests of his son Nachiketas to be given away as an offering said angrily 'I give you to death' and later became despondent when the son departed. The story as such does not take us anywhere. But the Upanishad does not start with the story without a purpose. It is necessary to note that the Kathaka version of the Taittiriya Brahmana (XI. 8) narrates the story of Nachiketas and the three boons he gets from Yama succinctly in a short section. Except that the Upanishad amplifies it with a special stress on the character of the last boon, the question about man's immortality and the answer concerning the Immortal, the substance is to be found in the Brahmana and to a large extent the very expressions. And we know the purpose of the texts in the Brahmana are narrated to serve the purpose of prompting man to do or refrain from doing a particular act. Such texts are called Declamatory texts,

## LIGHTS ON THE UPANISHADS

and guarding the fixed light in the intellectual mould of mind-power. For he is an Angiras, a nine-rayed one, *navagva*, active, opens the stalls of the Cows (of Light) hidden by the Panis. (IX.108.4). If Atharva prepares the path to discover the luminous cows, Dadhyan, his offspring, opens the gate of the prison-house where they are kept in secret. He is an Agni power, for all Angirasas are flame-powers of Agni presiding over the Earth, the physical existence. But he receives the light on the level of the luminous mind and that light is the light of the Divine Mind, Indra. He guards the knowledge of the secret Delight, Madhu, and gives it out as a password to the Ashvins when the ascending or voyaging soul reaches the limit or a point when a still higher Power of a different order of existence has to intervene and take charge. But the password cannot be given in the language of the intellectual mind which is after all a term of lower light and knowledge howsoever illumined and saturated with the delight of existence it may be. It has to be communicated through something forceful and dynamic and therefore Dadhyan is provided with the horse's head by the Ashvins; it represents the dynamic strength and motive-force of the swift-moving powers of Life which in the main is a higher and wider constituent of the Cosmos engulfing, pressing upon and penetrating into the physical existence. That the symbolic significance of the name Dadhyan is primarily suggested by the word *dadhi* itself has been already stated. It will be interesting to note that the word is used in Rv.X.46.1. as an ad-

Brahmana (XI. 7), in the section previous to that which begins with the story of Nachiketas we have the name mentioned as that of a Fire, the Flame that bridges Heaven and Earth; it is the celestial Agni who carries safe the fit soul across Death to the other side of the border of the earthly life, to the higher worlds upwards and this is called the Svargya Agni or Nachiketas Fire. But the description of that Agni quite well agrees with what is spoken of him in Yama's exposition in the Upanishad while granting the second boon to Nachiketas, the child of Vajashravas. To this we shall have occasion to refer when enquiring into the nature of the second boon. Again there is a hymn in the Rik Samhita ascribed to the Rishi Kumara Yamayana whom Sayana in his commentary identifies with the Nachiketas of the Kathopanishad. But this is doubtful; Sayana himself is not quite certain, does not adduce any reason or give reference to Vedic texts to support the conjecture beyond quoting a line from the Taittiriya Brahmana mentioning the episode of Nachiketas and with this help he tries to explain the hymn. But he is not satisfied with his discovery of the purport of the hymn and therefore as usual with him gives an alternative meaning granting the possibility of the Seer Kumara being someone other than Nachiketas. But the purport of the whole hymn as explained by Sayana does not help us in getting at the real substance of it. For our purpose the identity of the Rishi is not material, but the subject-matter of this hymn of seven verses is interesting, especially the sixth verse, and throws some light



on points that concern us in discussing the question of the departure of Nachiketas to the world of Yama. Below we give a close English rendering of the hymn, as it is of sufficient importance rich with suggestions bearing on our subject. The sense of the hymn will cease to offer insuperable difficulty if we remember that Yama is Aditya, the Sun of Truth in the Rig Veda, or as in the Katha text, son of Vivasvan (Sun), the Law, born of the Truth, Dharmaraja. The Rishi Kumara in the course of his self-development and spiritual achievement, by his self-exceeding occult knowledge transcends the barriers of the material life, of the earthly encasement, of the physical consciousness, develops and moves in his spiritual and subtle body in a higher consciousness to the vaster worlds above and perceives the Father, the Lord of creatures in the company of the Gods.

The Rishi says : "Here in this tree of goodly leaves (or flowers) Yama drinks with the Gods; (He) our Father, Lord of the creatures lovingly tends our ancient ones.

"Detracting, and in an evil (impure) way, I looked upon him who with love tends our ancient ones; and then I longed for him again."

Yama says : "O child, you do not see the chariot you mount, wheelless, one-poled, new, that you fashioned with mind, the chariot that turns excellently on all sides.

"Child, the chariot that you have urged from above the enlightened ones to turn towards me, that the

Saman has closely come upon, placed in a ship.

“Who begot the boy? who made the chariot to roll on? who will declare to us this day how the restoration was made?”

“As the restoration (gift in due order) was made, the front appeared; ahead (in the front) was spread the foundation (above), behind (below) the passage was made clear.<sup>1</sup>

“This is the house of Yama called the mansion of the Gods; here for him the flute is blown; here he is glorified with hymnal songs.”

Rv. X. 135.

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<sup>1</sup> The word *anudeyī* in verses 5 and 6 has been translated as funeral gift by European scholars. They have done this on the supposition that this hymn is the subject-matter of the funeral ceremony of a dead boy, Kumara.

They complain that Sayana's alternative meaning ensures a greater degree of obscurity. If in the alternative sense of the hymn the old Indian Pundit Sayana has applied the light of his Vedantic knowledge only to ensure its obscurity, modern Western Pundits, Wilson, Griffiths and others have let loose their fancy and made a funeral gift of the whole hymn; of course the dead child speaks to them in the second verse. This is indeed a curious improvement on Sayana.

*Anudeyī* strictly means ‘that which is to be given in due order’ (*anukramēṇa dātavyam*). The Rishi in his upward march gives himself in a methodical way to the higher Powers and is *restored* to his rightful place. Naturally, when he moves into the higher existence above the Earth plane, his foremost part, the front, appears first above the level of the earth-consciousness, then the foundation of the Cosmos which is above is spread before him; once this takes place and he goes up towards the Father, there is passage behind made clear through which he goes up,—

पुरस्ताद् बुध्न आततः पश्चान्निरयणं कृतम्.

Whether or not this hymn of the Rig Veda is really the basis of the story of Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad is not a matter of great importance to us. But the significance of the hymn cannot be missed and it obviously lies in the fact that the Rishi Kumara goes forward—shall we say upward—in a car fashioned by his mind, which is wheelless, one-poled, moving on all sides and in the very act of his going ahead, the passage behind is made, the opening is effected, so that his return journey from Yama to the Earth-life is made easy and the communication between this life and whatever is on the other side becomes natural and settled. The very enigmatic form of the hymn, the curious mask of the dialogue, the words of riddle used by Yama betray the occult character of the spiritual status the Rishi has won. The explanation of the whole hymn verse by verse is beside the mark here and we leave it to the diligent mind to discover the fuller import.

To return to the Nachiketas story : the first boon he asks of Yama is that he may be allowed to return to his father and find him tranquillised and prepared to recognise him. Yama grants the boon ; in other words Nachiketas, the Soul flaming up beyond towards the higher and vaster world above could retain the thread of his personal consciousness in recovering his material encasement, and so readjust himself in his changed inner condition to the demands of physical and outer life that he could be recognised by the father who gave him up to Death. It is not improbable that

*Vājaśravas* is a significant name representing one known for his material plenitude or one who is open to inspired hearing even in the midst of material plenty. This latter suggestion is prompted by the actual wordings in the Brahmana. For it is a Voice that speaks calling him to the house of Death (*tam utthitam vāk abhivadati*). And when Nachiketas mentions the choice of the first boon the actual wording in the Brahmana text means 'let me get back *alive* to my father' (*pitaram eva jīvan ayāni*). If then we choose to take note of the significance of the name Vajashravas as the outer being and consciousness in the material plenitude of physical existence, Nachiketas is the Flame of the Soul released from the bonds of physical being, offered as the last gift of Vajashravas who consciously owns the material plenty. The boy Kumara is the son, product of Vajashravas, is *na-ciketas*, not conscious of what he was being prepared for or what he himself was asking for when he offered himself as a gift in the sacrifice of his father. It is not wise to overlook the inner sense of *Vājaśravas* and *Naciketas*, especially in view of the fact that the Upanishad speaks of Nachiketas in the house of Yama as Vaishvanara Flame. For he is indeed the Fire in the universal Being of Matter, Life and Mind—spoken of as *trinaciketas*; hidden within in the human being he is the son of Man and if we may use a modern phrase, the main product of Evolution. Awake as the Flame of the uprising Soul he rises from the earth-life to the abode of Yama, the guardian of Law, Dharmaraja,

the Son of Truth symbolised by the Sun, Vivasvan. The significance of the other words and names used in the text of the Upanishad is irresistible. We may note the instance of Yama spoken of as Mrityu as well as Vaivasvata. For there are three aspects in which he can be viewed. He is Mrityu because he is the dispenser of death ; he is Yama, the Restrainer, one who controls, by keeping the Cosmic Law, Dharma ; that is because he is the son of Vivasvan, the Sun of Truth from which the Law is born.

These expressions clearly indicate the real nature of the first boon that Yama bestows upon Nachiketas—the boon, a capacity by which he can come back from the higher plane to the physical with the connection between this and the life beyond established, maintaining the thread of consciousness, for the opening is already made and the passage clear, to use the Vedic phrase. We may note in passing that the Sanskrit phrase *sūtrātmā* meant to refer to the Soul in the *linga deha* or subtle body, very well answers to the description of a soul retaining the thread of the personal consciousness in its journey to the other side of Life and discovering the exit passage to return to the Earth-life. This, then, is the first boon, the initial gain of Nachiketas which every soul aspiring to re-live a fuller life has to win by completely dying first in order to emerge into the Kingdom of the Keeper of the Law by which the Cosmic existence is preserved, through which one has to ascend the heights of exis-

tence above the cycle of life and death to the Eternal Life, Freedom, Immortality.

Let us proceed then to the second boon and look into its significance in the light of what has been stated in regard to the first. It lies in the fact that the soul which has gained the initial release from the net of the physical consciousness and earth-bound life and has maintained contact with the God, the higher Power administering the Cosmic Law, could through it gain the further knowledge of the Divine Being that presides over the Cosmic constitution of the Universe which begins with Heaven above and rests on Earth at this end. That Divine Being is called here the celestial Fire, *Svargya Agni*, the source and foundation of world-existence. He is not the Brahman beyond, but born of Brahman, he is the Divine Being Omniscient, resides in Heaven, rules over the Cosmos. High above and therefore superconscient to us he transcends the earthly nature. But here, within the mortal human being he is concealed in the secret cave, in the subliminal parts. By kindling him, by lighting that Fire, hidden in the subconscious and by the proper arrangement of the various parts and building him in right order in tune with the Cosmic law, He is revealed as the Divine manifested out of the Brahman. At his revelation the soul attains to a surpassing peace. Once he is intensely realised, in the three Soul-states, on the three levels (or on the three world-planes of the Vedic order) effecting points of contact in the triple being unified with Him (*tri-naciketas*),

one crosses beyond birth and death. Therefore when a man has gained access to this triple Nachiketas, the cords of mortality are loosened and drop altogether.

It is the instruction in this occult knowledge that Nachiketas receives from Yama for the second boon. To such a soul as attained to the Divine existence the power of Prakriti, creative Nature, comes unasked and falls under its control. This is the sense of Yama favouring Nachiketas with an additional boon, unasked, the grant of the Necklace of many forms.

Now we come to the most puzzling part of the discussion, the question about death. Without fear of contradiction we may at once state that the question Nachiketas asks of Yama about death, has been among the most misunderstood of questions. Is it his desire to know what happens to man after death ? Can it be that he has doubts about the survival of the soul when man dies ? Such a question cannot arise, for he is already present before Yama ; not only that he did appear before him, but he got the boon to come back to life as a recognisable personality. So this cannot be a question about the survival of the soul. Again by the second boon he has attained his place in a divine existence, enjoying immortality, having crossed beyond life and death. Therefore we can safely say that he is not afflicted with doubts about the immortality of the soul in the sense that it continues its existence in other worlds, the world of Heaven or Gods which he already enjoys. What then does he mean when he says "When man has passed

away, some say 'He is', some 'This he is not' ? Is there anything in man different from the body, senses and mind which survives their disintegration and assumes contact with another body of the same or different kind either here on earth or elsewhere in another existence ? If there is such a thing,—call it spirit, purusha or soul—how can we say it is the same being, the same person that survives death and continues to be in an after-existence or takes birth ? And what we usually understand by man is neither the soul separately nor the body and mind and senses, but all considered together, what we may call the human personality. Therefore when there is disorganisation of the physical organism, whatever survives does not survive as the mere spirit, purusha, or atman, the self. For if it is survival of the Purusha alone and not with something of the human personality characteristic of the man that dies, how are we justified in calling the survival as that of the personal self ? How can there be a personal self without a personality ? After all it is the personality that counts for identity of which it is the stamp and expression.<sup>1</sup>

Those who give the answer in the affirmative hold that there is one who is called the enjoyer (*bhoktā*).

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to the ordinary man without any spiritual attainment the *Chāndogya* says sharply 'be born and die' (*jāyasva mriyasva*) meaning that the common man has little of the soul in him and has no future, he *dies*. That is also the meaning of the doubt—some say 'This he is not'. This, what he calls himself now, dies; whatever survives is not *this* 'he'—mark the words '*nā ayaṁ asti iti ca anye*'.



by virtue of his being yoked to soul, senses and mind and it is he who survives death. Those who say that a man when he dies, does not survive as a person or soul with a human personality mean by implication that personality is a developing proposition, that it is subject to constant change in the world-existence which itself is in a state of perpetual flux. If it is a colourless all-pervasive, omniscient Reality, Brahman, which resides in and supports the individual lives and minds and souls, that survives, then It being the Immortal, the Eternal One certainly persists, continues untouched by the mortality of man, survives. Therefore if man is That, then in that sense one can say 'he is'. But if by man is meant the human personality, then, as such he does not survive and so some say '*this* he is not' for the reason already stated, viz., that it is ever-changing. If nothing else survives but the One, it is the same thing as saying that when a man dies the decomposed elements are absorbed by the Universal or restored to their universal correspondences, and the Eternal One alone remains unaffected, the Immortal Being. It is just like the universal Space (*mahākāśa*) in the jar (*ghaṭa*) remaining unaffected by the breaking of the jar and therefore surviving it. If so, for all practical purposes it comes to mean that 'like corn mortal man decays and like corn he is born', in the words of Nachiketas. But is that what the Upanishad says as regards the true nature and goal of man ? It is true that the text lays emphasis on the Eternal Reality, the Supreme One, as the Im-

mortal Being—all else is not immortal or eternal but subject to change, transitory. Even when a heavenly being, a god, *deva*, is said to be immortal, he is not so in his own right, his immortality is not absolute, but derived from the Eternal One, by his Cosmic status, by his proximity in Consciousness to his own Origin which is the Origin of all the gods and powers, of all the worlds and beings. If the Upanishad lectures only upon this True Immortality absolute and one and leaves it there, we can very well say that the question of Nachiketas is not answered or if answered at all it is done in such a way that the question is evaded. In that case Nachiketas might very well say, “Sir, I talk of chalk, you talk of cheese”. But Yama takes care to answer the question almost as suggestions and hints indicated in a few verses, assuming the questions to refer to death of men in general, even though it may not fully apply to Nachiketas who is a special case, having already won heavenly immortality which is relative, not the highest and absolute of which Nachiketas has yet to learn from Yama for his last boon.

A single answer to the question about the death, survival and immortality of man will be misleading, is not possible at all ; for the question is complicated, not simple ; men are many, all are not of the same level and development, of equal wisdom and capacity for knowledge and action ; for these are the factors that contribute to and are assimilated by that nature, that power, that element in man’s being which survives

the extinction of the bio-physical mechanism. Therefore the Upanishad says "Subtle is the law". Certainly it does not teach a downright Materialism, a modern version of the ancient *lokāyatika*; on the other hand Yama says, "Gautama, surely, I will tell you the Secret, the Eternal, Brahman, and also what happens to the Soul after one dies." Again "Some enter the womb for re-embodiment of the Spirit, some follow after the Motionless according to their deeds, according to their knowledge." (V. 6,7.) Here what it is that actually survives and prepares for embodiment for the Spirit is not stated; but in the light of other passages which we shall presently refer to, we can take it as understood that it is the soul that is meant by the word *ātman* used in the text—mark the words, *yathā maraṇam prāpya ātmā bhavati*. Even then we have to know what exactly is the relation of the soul that takes rebirth to the Secret, the Eternal, Brahman of which Yama promises in the same breath to instruct Nachiketas. Before we consider why and how some souls for embodiment enter the womb and some not, let us see, confining ourselves to the passages of this Upanishad, how the soul that is reborn is related to the Brahman, the Eternal, the Immortal One.

The perception by the ancients of the truth about the Soul and God, the individual spirit and the universal Self, the lower self and the higher spiritual Being is recorded in the Hymns and is as old as the Rig Veda and we find a famous Rik of the mystic Dirghatamas

bodily taken and cited by the Mundaka Upanishad. The same truth is expressed in a different figure here in the Katha text. If in the vision of the Vedic seer the two Selves are two birds, eternal companions, dwelling in a common tree of Life, one eating the delicious fruit of the tree and the other not eating but simply watching his fellow, the sages of the Upanishad, especially in the Katha, use a different figure to deliver the same truth, but with more explicitness, with apt analogues which are expressive symbolisms and truth-forms, rather than poetical similes, to illustrate the relation of the Twin-Souls. In the Rik of the seer the lower self is the bird who dwells in the common tree of Life with God, the supreme Soul; he is lost in the sweetness of life and therefore has fallen from his lordship. But when he sees the other who is Lord and Beloved, he realises that all this is His greatness and his grief leaves him. But how does the soul take part in and taste the fruits of life without the sanction of the other, the Lord ? To imply his sanction, it is said, he *watches*; for his very *seeing* (*abhi-cākaśīti*) carries with it all that is necessary to actuate the other to take part in life and therefore in that sense and to that extent he too is a sharer of the fruits of life; but he is not moved by it, as the other fellow therefore it is said he simply watches. But the Katha makes it still more explicit when it says (III. I.) that there are two who drink deep of the truth of good deeds; they dwell in the highest half of the most High (*parama parārdhe*); they have entered into and are lodged in the

secret cave. Therefore they are not far from each other and separate. If their plenary Home is in the supreme half at the summit of the Creation and therefore far from us, they are also close within us, in the secret depths, in the heart of the creature they have entered into. One can know Him, the eater of the sweetness, *madhva-dam*, the *jīva*, ever close as the Self within, that is the lord of what was and what shall be (IV. 5.); thus if the higher Self is a close companion, the Self of the lower self lodged in the heart and can be seen within the self clearly as in a mirror, high above they are both one together, inseparable as Light and Shade in the high heights of the Cosmic ladder. For the One in His manifestation as creation is said to be the Eternal Tree, Ashwattha, whose roots are above and branches are downward and it is He who is called Brahman, Immortal, the Shining One in whom all the worlds are established, and there is nothing beyond him, none can go beyond it.

Therefore in considering the relation of the re-incarnating soul to the higher Self which is both within us and above us we shall not confine ourselves to a single view-point, for that will be a partial truth misleading, and therefore untruth in the result. We may cite the instance of the Upanishad describing how the Atman is perceived on different levels; within the self here he is seen as in a mirror, above in the world of Fathers as in dream, still higher as in water one sees the surface of an object and in the highest Heaven of the Spirit as Light and Shade. The same thing ap-

of their labour. Some, the text says, follow after the Motionless, *sthānu*, which means, according to Shankara, that some souls go back to the condition of inanimate objects like trees, etc. It can mean the Unchanging One which is of course Brahman. Whether a human soul does actually go back to a lower birth and become a brute or log of wood, or it is rhetoric to say so, need not be considered here, and is beyond our scope.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Upanishad proclaims that the fate of the soul is determined by what it learns to do and know and has done and known. It may be asked how or why the soul chooses to do or know in a particular way different from others. Our text has a ready answer in that it says (V. 13.) that it is the One, the Eternal in all that is transitory, it is the One supremely conscious in all conscious beings, it is the One that orders the desires of many and that the calm and strong behold that One within the self and theirs is the Peace of God. This disposes of the question why so many should desire in so many ways and are impelled to move and act divergently; for the simple reason is that the Origin and Impeller, *preritā*, is He, moving the many and lodged in the many. Therefore to know him before

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<sup>1</sup> A full discussion of the question of rebirth is not possible or warranted here. Indian philosophers from time immemorial have accepted it as an undeniable fact. All the same, it is a philosophical dogma. The subject has received a systematic treatment at the hands of Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*. For a less difficult thinking, his Letters, some of them are published in book-form, are commendable. Precious truths and rare authentic information are to be found in the *Conversations with the Mother*.

the soul slowly loosens itself from the body is imperative and cannot be postponed by anyone who is determined not to die like a worm. For even when by the merit of one's own knowledge and deed and consequent development for realisation of some kind he could secure a release from the lower bonds and a status in a higher existence after death, he has to come back again here for the realisation of that One because it is here that he can be seen within one's self as in a mirror. Our text treats as next to nonentities the souls that leave the body without knowing Him. To know Him here is to possess and be possessed by the Truth, the One, the Immortal. How to know is the question. In some of the verses hints are thrown about the means which one has to employ to practise the Yoga which yields the secret. But in the last resort one makes an exclusive choice of the Truth, the Supreme, the Self; it is then that the One, the Self reveals the Substance of Reality, its own body to the soul.

But that is the ultimate step, the *immediate* means in which the exclusive choice of the Self, made by the soul seems the reverse side or the consequence of the free choice of the Self to reveal itself. But, for the initial seeking of the Truth by one in the Ignorance who is tossed by the doubt whether man ceases or continues to be and if that One is within him or not, manifest or unmanifest, Faith is the first indispensable, the prime factor that makes for competence to receive the secret Knowledge. Nachiketas had it; even before he made his pilgrimage to the temple of Yama, Faith

took possession of him. Later also 'Teach me, I have faith (*śraddadhānāya*)' implores Nachiketas. To start with faith is as a matter of course necessary, intelligible. But faith in what ? Faith in the existence of Him in all manifestation, in one's self. For how can It be known anywhere other than in him who says "It is" (i.e., who has the faith that he is)? (VI. 12.) First It is to be known in its manifestation, in one's own self; because it is both Manifest (*sat*) and Unmanifest (*asat*). Once it is known as the Manifest, then its essential truth, the Unmanifest, dawns upon man. (VI. 13.)

Therefore with faith in His presence one must proceed to discover Him within one's own being, in the depths, in the heart. This discovery is not possible or made effective by the mere mental seeking however keen and subtle it be, though it may be helpful to discipline the mind; nor by the vital strength with all the desires and passions of life canalised and focussed contributing to its vigour, though that may be precious for its purification and disposition to come under self-control, but chiefly by the soul with all the help it can command from the instruments, mind and senses and life. The discovery by the soul of the Self, the God within us, is indeed a revelation; but it is not an experience unrelated to the material body; for it is not the result of mental analysis. It is not a metaphysical separation of the self that the Upanishad means, for it says "One must separate Him with patience from one's body as one separates the main fibre from a blade of grass". (VI. 17.) In such concrete terms the Upani-



shad delivers the authentic words in regard to the lodgement of the Spirit in the physical body of man. This is what the teaching arrives at—that the knowledge and realisation of the Truth about the Immortal, the Spirit in the mortal, is possible and necessary for man in his life on earth, that such an attainment alone prepares for his continued existence and survival after the falling of the physical sheath as an individual Soul in a well-formed, superbly centralised, transparent, subtle and spiritual encasement that can maintain itself and withstand the forces of darkness and death; for it is these and their kindred that turn and dominate the cycle of birth and rebirth in the dominion of Ignorance and falsehood, in the lower half of Cosmic existence.

This, then, is the significance of the triple boon that Yama grants to Nachiketas. If the initiative for Truth Knowledge comes from the possession of faith that gives the momentum for a self-exceeding effort to go beyond the common run of life and come face to face with the Power that knows the secrets of Cosmic existence and maintains the Cosmic law, then, that is a gain; just a primary gain, but definite and far-reaching, it brings with it for the soul of courage, calm and strength who makes the decisive choice for outreaching the routine life and repeated circuits of the crude outward consciousness, the power to open the passage leading to the other side of life and to link it with the bodily life here and return consciously through the new-found way to the material existence. This, indeed, is a kind of release from the coarser and bounded life and to that

extent a partial liberation from Nature's control. This is the meaning of the first boon, the first gain—an occult power and knowledge. But it is limited in its scope; the knowledge, the power of the soul that has gained entrance into the secret chambers of Yamadharma, the ruler of the Cosmic Law of which life and death are phases, is confined to a select portion, to a fragment of its own being, narrow, not wide, not sufficiently deep or high, not extended to the whole of its being. Therefore in the second boon, the next step is taken, giving the secret, the knowledge of the Fire, the Divine Being who is the origin of the worlds, the foundation of world-existence, whose Home is above, in the heights of the Cosmos, who is yet hidden within man, behind in the subliminal parts, below and above. The gain of this knowledge, of the secret and origin of world-existence, heaven and earth, includes the method of waking up this Force, lighting up this Fire within one's being, by which the soul becomes conscious of the Divine Being of the Cosmos and builds Him in himself. In effect, the soul is widened in its sphere of knowledge, heightened in its stature, sets firm its points of contact in the triple activity of the Universe of Matter, Life and Mind; and united to the Cosmic and heavenly Fire in its threefold principle for knowledge and work it stands above, with an intense peace settling on it, immortal, out of the rolling wheel of life and death.

This is a greater gain, remarkable and grand in its conception and achievement. But this great consum-

mation could rest permanently upon only one thing and that is the knowledge of the One and the Immortal from which the Divine Being of the Cosmos is born.

For that is the sole and absolute Being, the Immortal; on it rests the birth, the growth, the conduct, the government of the universe; in it shines the Light that, dispelling all darkness, shows the real nature of the births and deaths of beings; by it are revealed the soul-formations of the Spirit seeming to be born and reborn; it is synonymous with the unshakable and immense rock of Peace and therefore is the basis, the foreground as well as the background of all true knowledge and activity in the Universe; in short, it is the first Cause and the final Effect of all movements, separative and collective, or unifying and total, in the Human existence or World-being. Once the soul attains this Peace, the gain is immense, abiding, absolute and real—the gain from which other gains get their values. If the value of the first gain lies in leading to the next step, in the loosening of the cords of ego-centric life for Knowledge of the Cosmic Law and the attainment of a heavenly immortality, such an attainment itself, however grand and covetable, is shaky or falls and fails without a true and firm basis, and therefore derives its substance and value from the foremost of all attainments; and that is the winning of Immortality by the realisation of the One who transcends the All, above life and death, yet hidden in the heart, in the deepest depths of the human being. If one knows him here before the body withers away, then he lives in the Light,





but are seekers of Self-Knowledge and God-Knowledge, endeavouring whenever necessary or possible to get at the secrets of the Vedic Wisdom, with their lives dedicated to the development of an inner Self-culture. Therefore in our pursuit of knowledge for a correct understanding of the Madhu Vidya of the Shatapatha Brahmana we adopt a positive method of interpreting the Riks quoted therein and shall scrutinise and see the relevancy of the Vedic verses being cited in the context. This certainly involves the rejection of certain theories in regard to the Veda and Vedanta propounded by western Orientalists and based to some extent on indigenous scholasticism represented by Sayana's great commentaries on the Brahmanas and Samhitas of all the Vedas. Even if we ignore these views and hold them as misconceptions partly due to temperamental inequipment, fanciful and fundamentally wrong in their starting assumptions, conjectural and hasty in their generalisations and conclusions, we must still recognise the fact that after all they are the special contributions of Vedic scholarship from the West, are improvements in their own way with the help of many branches of modern learning upon the information given by native Indian scholarship, by mediaeval commentaries on the most ancient texts of a remote pre-historic age.

Therefore it will be of no use to state, much less to examine the conclusions of modern scholarship concerning the subject of the Vedic hymns and Vedic seers ; but even though we need not scrutinise the

position of orthodox Indian schools of thought in regard to the original and most sacred scripture of ancient India, it is essential that we must know and bear in mind what it is and how it has for many centuries held sway over the learned classes. Great scholars, teachers and founders of various sects in India, not only the priests and pundits, have followed and admitted in practice as correct the long line of the ritualistic tradition springing from the Brahmanas. Though ritualism as a professed Vedic creed has for long existed as is evidenced by the texts of the Brahmanas, it is Jaimini, the author of *Mimamsa-sutras* who made it *the* Vedic creed ; he gave it a definite shape basing it on a system of ethical and religious thought, propounded the theory that though *Mantras* and *Brāhmaṇas* form together the Veda, the former has value in so far as it subserves the purpose of rituals for which the Brahmanas are the sole supreme eternal authority ! Since then the Upanishads which form part of the Brahmanas, treated by the Jaimini school as supplements subsidiary to the Brahmanas, *Vidhiśeśa*, became the book of knowledge, *Jñāna-kāṇḍa*, in the later systems of philosophy, while the Brahmanas, the book of rituals, *Karmakāṇḍa*, occupied the central part of the Veda with the Mantras tagged to them for use in the ceremonials of the Vedic rites. This division of the *Karma* and *Jñāna* portions became more and more pronounced until a tacit understanding among different schools of religio-philosophic thought was established with the stamp of approval recorded

in the classical writings of original thinkers, of great philosophical teachers from Shankaracharya downwards. The relegation of the Mantras, verse or prose (Iti or Yajus), to the lumber-room was brought to prominence by their occasional display and convenient use with doubtful significance in the dominant ceremonial religion, so much so that the Mimamsakas use the word *Śruti* to mean Brahmanas, while to the philosophers, the later teachers of the Vedānta, the term means the Upanishads. This is the position that has been in vogue for many centuries now.

While the Brahmanas (Karma-kanda) found their votaries in Jaimini and his followers with their rules of textual interpretation and theories of knowledge and queer notions of the Vedic rites and their efficacies and fruits, the Upanishads (Jnana-kanda) were taken up for enquiry by others, the doubtful texts were examined and reconciled, systematised and put into shape by the formulation of what is called the *Vedānta Darśana* of Badarayana who had had the fortune—shall we say misfortune?—of having easily a dozen diverse interpreters some of whom are poles apart, irreconcilably opposed to one another. The Mantras, the hymns of the Veda, Parent of the Brahmanas including the Upanishads, did not receive the attention of anyone, separately as a body of original sacred texts; they became settled into oblivion as a living scripture, but continued to enjoy a respectable place as a sacred name, a hallowed memory in the minds of laymen and priests and pundits though not always for



identical reasons. This neglected, rather unclaimed treasure, this soul of all that is sacred in the life and literature of the race, bearing the name *Veda* which means knowledge, did at last claim the attention of an extraordinary scholar, Sayanacharya, of the fourteenth century who was well equipped with all that is necessary for undertaking the Herculean task. He has left to posterity a finished and complete commentary on all the Brahmanas and Mantra Samhitas of which the Rik Samhita presents insuperable difficulties for interpretation. But he overcomes them, gives generally a lucid exposition of the hymns assigning their place in the ceremonial worship and presents a harmonious whole of the plan of his work. The merits of this stupendous work of Sayana are many and so precious that his work is an indispensable help for Vedic studies. But there is a central weakness, a defect that is at the very foundation of the edifice that he has put up in his commentary on the Rik Samhita. He shared the religious beliefs of his age, an age far removed from the times of the Brahmanas, not to speak of those of the hymns which he chose to explain. He followed and expounded the Mimamsa doctrine of ritualism as the soul of the Vedas, wrote his commentaries first on the Brahmanas and the Yajur Veda which is the Veda for sacrifice and began his commentary on the Rig Veda. He did so, as he himself explains in the introduction to his Rig-bhashya, because a finished commentary on the Brahmanas, the central part of the Veda for the ritualist, would faci-

litate his labours in explaining the Riks, obviously in such a way as to make them fit in with the Brahmana texts. In this endeavour he has proved a success beyond measure, a success that never crowned the previous efforts either of the Brahmanas themselves or later of the Mimamsakas. For the latter did not care to go into the meanings of the Riks referred to in the Brahmana passages and even when they had to know the sense of a *Mantra*, they found it smooth sailing as the ready-made explanation was given in the Brahmana texts with which alone they were concerned in constructing their rules of interpretation of scriptural texts. In a sense Sayana went far beyond the Brahmanas themselves ; for it is doubtful if the latter were sure that they have correctly interpreted the Riks even for the purpose of rituals, and what is more, they have not taken up the whole body of the hymnal text for explanation and use in the sacrificial rites ; above all, they seem to make an attempt to explain only select hymns and stress their significance in their own way without themselves claiming or voicing superiority in wisdom and authority over the Mantras.

But Sayana's commentary on the Riks succeeds in establishing Ritualism as the sole and central creed of the Veda, founded on the eternal self-existent words and passages of the Brahmanas to which the Mantras are the uncreated self-existent accessories. Therefore he explains verses, even when they are of spiritual and mystical import in a half-hearted manner and makes them fit into the context of a ritual and where

he could not avoid the sense of the hymns which are avowedly spiritual, he is frank and states, 'These verses convey spiritual ideas ; other verses also can be similarly explained, but as they help us little in our purpose which is to substantiate the supremacy of sacrificial rites we need not trouble ourselves further in this direction'. It is beyond the scope of our subject here to recount the defects and virtues of Sayana's commentary. Suffice it to say that his work is indispensable for a student of the Veda for the invaluable help it gives—the numerous references, mention of ancient authorities, traditions, lexicons, legends, alternative meanings suggesting other possible senses of words, verses and hymns, elucidation of accents and points of grammar and construction of sentences in these ancient litanies of a remote antiquity. There are other commentaries on the Riks, but in fragments and are of little avail and importance before the weight and prestige of Sayana and the volume of his work.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the central defect of Sayana's work remains. It is the defect of a representative obscurantism of the time, unprogressive and narrow, vast erudition developing 'an extraordinary poverty of sense' attached to the hymns of the Vedic seers, enthroning

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<sup>1</sup> Anandatirtha, known as Madhvacharya, earlier than Sayana has written a commentary on the first forty Suktas of the Rik Samhita. It is an interesting work pointing out that the Riks have to be interpreted in three ways and that the hymns are the fountain-head of all spiritual knowledge and God-knowledge. (Vide *Lights on the Veda* pages 84-86)

in the heart of the Vedic Religion the external cult and worship of Nature Powers and performance of ceremonial rites for material benefits and other-worldly pleasures, a sublimated hedonistic doctrine before which refined ideals of an inner and higher life and spiritual knowledge have their facets disfigured or eclipsed and hidden in disgrace.

If we accept Sayana's interpretation of the hymns, it means that we also accept the underlying motive of his commentary to which we have already made clear reference. It means that all the sacred scriptures from the Vedas downwards, the *Āgamās*, *śaiva*, *vaiṣṇava* and *śākta*, the *Purāṇas*, the writings and teachings of the great saints of the North, of the Nayanars and Alwars of the South, are all fanciful products of minds in fool's paradise when they sing the glory of the Veda as the store-house of all sacred knowledge. In short the universal reverence for the Vedas, their reputation as the repository of Divine Wisdom is a chimera, a phantasm without substance, a 'colossal myth'.

### THE RECOVERED LIGHT

Sri Aurobindo marks out a fresh line of approach to the study of the Vedic hymns. Under uncommon circumstances he made his entry into the world of Vedic wisdom, perceived with the discerning eye of light the revealing images of the Vedic Gods and Goddesses, chanced upon the hidden secrets of human

speech as a living force and organic growth with the people of that original Epoch of the Rig Veda, opened the doors behind which lay open the covert meanings of the Mantras of the Rik Samhita. It is sufficient for our purpose to note just some of the salient features of the system of his interpretation as that will facilitate its application to the subject on hand ; and more is not possible within the limits of the space we have set for ourselves here. We make no apology for giving relevant passages, where necessary, culled from Sri Aurobindo's own writings. "The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external powers of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. The psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close knit and coherent than the physical." It is the latter sense—the physical and the external—that is more pervading than the spiritual, the inner and psychological, in the interpretations of Sayana on which European scholarship has based its theories of Nature-worship of primitive semi-civilised Aryans of the Rig Vedic times. Yet it is the spiritual and inner sense that is restored to the hymns in the writings of Sri Aurobindo on Veda and Vedic symbolism. For the Rig Veda belongs to an age when the social stage of the race was profoundly religious and imaginative in its religion as is always the case with human society in its beginnings—we may

call it primitive—whether or not it is cultured, civilised and economically advanced. A strongly symbolic mentality governs its thought, customs and institutions ; in fact “Symbolism and a wide-spread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling go together.... The symbol then is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities—the Divine, the Gods, the Vast and the deep Unnamable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences which are behind them and shape and govern them.”

This is the background against which the language and substance of the hymns and the seers and the Gods of the Rig Veda have to be approached for a sensible appreciation and understanding. “The Vedic deities are names, powers and personalities of the universal Godhead and they represent each some essential puissance of the Divine Being. They manifest the Cosmos and are manifest in it. Children of the Light, Sons of the Infinite, they recognise in the soul of man their brother and ally and desire to help and increase him by themselves increasing in him so as to possess his world with their light, strength and beauty. The Gods call man to a divine companionship and alliance ; they attract and uplift him to their fraternity, invite his aid and offer theirs against the Sons of Darkness and Division. Man in return calls

the Gods to his sacrifice, offers to them his swiftnesses and his strengths, his clarities and his sweetnesses and receives them into his being and their gifts into his life.”

The Gods, then, are not simply ‘poetical personalities of abstract ideas or of psychological and physical functions of Nature. To the Vedic seers they are living realities ; the vicissitudes of the human soul represent a Cosmic struggle not merely of principles and tendencies but of the Cosmic Powers which support and embody them. These are the Gods and the Demons. On the world-stage and in the individual soul the same real drama with the same personages is enacted’.

This, in sum, is the vision that Sri Aurobindo presents to us in his studies of the Rig Veda. But when we take up the texts we must remember what he has pointed out, that the Rik Samhita as we have it ‘represents the close of a period, not its commencement, not even some of its successive stages’. A sufficiently long period must have elapsed before there could be settled such an invariable fixity of thought and substance with depth, richness and subtlety, couched in a finished metrical form marked by a constant masterful skill in technique.

It is this line of interpretation that eminently fits into the texts of the earlier Upanishads which make references to the Veda or Vedic seers, and quote occasionally for their conclusions verses from the hymns of the Rik Samhita. For the Brahmanas and the Upanishads

## LIGHTS ON THE UPANISHADS

the record of a powerful revival which took the old text and ritual as a starting-point for a new development of the spiritual thought and expression. The Brahmanas represent the conservation of forms, Upanishads the revelation of the soul of the Veda.

### THE MADHU BRAHMANA

The Madhu Brahmana of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, not the same as the Madhu Vidya of the Chandogya (III. 1.), contains certain Riks which we have chosen to consider here. When we apply to them the principles underlying the line of interpretation that we adopt for reasons already stated and keep in mind the significant sense of the Vedic names and words and the right conception of the Gods, we find no difficulty in appreciating the propriety of introducing the Riks at the conclusion of the short course that the Upanishad gives in praise of the Soma, the Soma Honey, the *Madhu*. Before enquiring into the meaning and drift of the Vedic verses in the Vedanta, it is necessary that we must know the subject-matter of the Madhu-Brahmana as well as the legends known around it as recorded in the Shatapatha Brahmana; we can then examine and trace the legends to their source in the hymns and see to what extent they are in fact supported by the Riks themselves; for the Brahmanas often quote a tradition or legend to find an explanation for certain hymns or verses which were used as parts of the Vedic rites of which the Soma



sacrifice is the most important and indispensable for the performance of others, such as Ashvamedha. There is a ceremony introductory to the Soma Yaga, called *Pravargya* with which is closely associated the Madhu Vidya. And here is the legend connected with what is called the Pravargya ceremony.

Indra taught the sage Dadhyan, son of Atharvan, the secret of Pravargya Vidya and Madhu Vidya, saying that in case he revealed this knowledge to others his head would be cut off. The twin Gods, Ashvins, overheard this and called upon Dadhyan to teach them the forbidden knowledge. To avoid Indra's punishment they cut off the sage's head and replaced it with a horse's head with which the sage revealed the Vidyas to the Ashvins. When Indra was apprised of this breach of faith on the part of the sage, with his thunderbolt he cut off the sage's head which was the horse's ; thereupon the Ashvins restored to Dadhyan his own head (Shatapatha Br. XIV. 1.4). Wherever Dadhyan and Ashvins are mentioned in the Riks, Sayana refers to the Pravargya and Madhu Vidyas and recalls this story. There is another story about the sage and though it is not connected with Pravargya we shall mention it here with a purpose which will be presently evident, as it is quoted from another Brahmana by Sayana in his commentary (Rv.I. 84. 13, 14).

When Dadhyan, son of Atharvan lived, the Asuras were frightened and subdued by his very sight, but occupied the whole earth the moment he departed



consider the nature of the Pravargya ceremony which is introductory to the Soma sacrifice. That this Vedic rite is a symbolic act would be evident from the significant names and the substances used and the hymns uttered. Here Sayana is superbly dependable and this is the substance of his explanation and description of the rite given in his commentary (Taitti. V. II. and Shatap. Br. XIV. I. I-II). There are three terms which we must note and they are significant names—Mahavira, Gharma, Pravargya. Gharma is something prepared, an eatable cooked for offering in the ritual by pouring fresh milk in the heated clarified butter. This act of pouring of the milk is called *pravṛñjana* which is the same as *pravargya*. Mahavira is the earthenware in the shape of a mortar in which the aforesaid *gharma* is prepared for offering. Sayana adds that though these three are three different things they all have come to be meant as one and the same thing figuratively, *gaunī vṛtti*. But the whole rite is named *pravargya* after the aforesaid act of *pravarga*. For indeed it is often called *pravargya karma* as it is the act that is the important factor here, though by courtesy, *upacāra*, it is called Vidya. But the Madhu-Vidya which is called a limb, *aṅga*, of this rite is not an act but a knowledge, a secret which is represented by the chant of certain Riks, addressed to Ashvins.

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meaning referring to the eternality of things, at any rate, it is to be so interpreted. This topic is discussed in the *Lights on the Veda* to which the reader can turn for further information.

We are not concerned with the further details of the Pravargya rite, but what has been stated is necessary and sufficient to enable us to understand the significance of the ritual act of which the knowledge of Madhu is an important limb. Light is thrown on the symbolic character by the suggestive names of the substance that is cooked, of what is poured into it, and of the vessel in which the preparation takes place. In the system of Vedic symbolism *gharma* is brilliant heat; it is a kindred of *ghṛta* and *ghṛṇi*, all of the same family meaning 'to shine, to burn'; *payas* is milk, luminous yield of the Cow of Light; *mahāvīra*, the earthen vessel, is the human body of great heroic mettle. Now the sacrificer, the human soul, after his consecration for the performance of the Soma sacrifice which is the offering of all one's experiences and delight of existence to the Gods, the Universal Powers of the supreme Godhead, starts with an act by which the nourishing rays of Light, the yield of the luminous Cow, enter into the vessel of human body of heroic strength for the sustenance and completion of the substance that is cooked. It is the brilliant heat of Tapas held in the human vessel that is trained, kept under control and so purified and disciplined by the rigours of tapasya, *mahāvīrasamskāra*, that it can hold the healthy and brilliant heat of the substances of being to be offered to the Gods. To make the process of preparation pleasant and intelligible, more and more of the soothing luminous rays of knowledge enter into the course of the sadhana at work in the body. This is still an intro-

when the Soma juice is ready for offering. At the present preparatory stage he requires the help of a God or Gods who could give him health, strength and joy to sustain him in his effort so that he can later continue the journey in the Sacrifice. Now he calls upon the Twin Powers, the riders on the horse signifying Life-energy, Ashvins; for they are 'the effective Powers of the Ananda which proceed out of the Truth-Consciousness and which manifesting variously in all the three worlds maintain man in his journey'. They use the vitality of the human being as the motive-force of the journey. They give health, beauty, wholeness to the body, ease and joy; they are the lords of weal and bliss. It is thus that the Ashvins figure in the Madhu Vidya without which the initial stages of the sacrifice cannot be gone through. For it is the offering to the Ashvins of the Sweet, *madhu*, the Delight of life that evokes their response and they come with their swift-moving powers of healing and health and strength and joy. It is by the completion of the introductory stage in the now-forgotten path of the Vedic Yoga by the help of the Ashvins, that the sacrificer, the sadhaka enters into a higher status, to a wider existence outgrowing the bounds of the normal mind and life that persist not in the earlier stages alone of the sadhana, but a good deal later also. When a luminous knowledge of the Delight of Being in the physical existence becomes fixed in the intellectual mind, then the condition is present for the fulfilment of the limited life and mind, for their self-exceeding handed

wholly or in part bears on the face of it a symbolic significance, it is prudent and advisable to depend mainly on the earlier symbolism of the Vedic seers for arriving at the substance of the Riks. Let us, then, take up the question of Dadhyan; for we have already got an idea of the Ashvins who are the seekers of honey, Madhu; and Madhu is decidedly honey in later literature, though it often means in the Rig Veda anything sweet used as a food, especially drink. But it denotes more precisely Soma Rasa, the juice of the Soma plant in the external sense, and in the sense of the Mystics Soma is the Lord of Delight and Immortality and the *rasa* is the Delight of Existence.

That Dadhyan is the son of Atharvan and had the knowledge of Madhu, that he gave it to Ashvins on their providing him with a horse's head, that the Ashvins drew into themselves the mind of Dadhyan and then the horse's head uttered his words to them, that he himself had got that secret knowledge from Tvashtri, that Indra with the bones of Dadhyan slew ninety-nine *Vritras*—these are all the accounts we meet with repeatedly in the hymns—everything else belongs to the legends.<sup>1</sup> Now it is necessary to fix the sense of *Dadhyan*. When this is done, the rest of the names that figure in these Riks referring to Dadhyan offer no difficulty whatever as we shall see

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<sup>1</sup> Rv. I. 116. 12; 117. 22; 119. 9; 84. 13, 14. These and other Riks mention or allude to the same transaction of Dadhyan with Ashvins, and only once to Indra using Dadhyan. Dadhyan opens the Cow-stalls, but that is not connected with the Ashvins (IX. 108.4)

in Heaven, and that thence he brought him forth and fixed him here in the human existence. Atharva like other Vedic names is a significant word meaning 'not moving out', but fixing himself, disposed to consolidation. That 'fixation' or 'not moving' is the meaning of the word will be evident from another kindred word *atharvyam*, an adjective meaning according to Sayana, 'unable to move' (*gantum asamarthan*, Rv. I. 112. 10). Atharva then is the first original Flame-power of Agni in general, fixed in the human being, generating Dadhyan, a special form of himself, a development, a particular manifestation with a definite status and function as a radiant lustre of the Divine Flame, *ātharvaṇa āngirasa agni*.

What then is distinctive about Dadhyan ? The word itself suggests the sense and gives the clue to discover his status and ascertain his function. The task becomes easier if we remember the symbolic senses indicated by the double meanings of the three words *go*, *dadhi*, *yava*, (milk, curds, grain) with which the triple draughts of Soma juice are prepared. And this is the inner meaning: Soma is the Delight extracted from existence; it is mixed with the milk which is that of the luminous Cows, with the curds the fixation of their yield in the intellectual mind, and with the grain the formulation of the light in the force of the physical mind. The two parts of the word Dadhyan, *dadhi* and *anc* give us the meaning that it is a distinct lustrous power moving in the yield of Light fixed in the intellectual mind. It must be noted that while Atharvan brought

V.3), put on a different facet of the cosmic Godhead to adjust himself to the laws and conditions of the higher level differently constituted to which he moves. Or, as a Cosmic Power he stays on where his function demands, on the higher status of enlightened intellect and gives his assent to the sacrificer, to the human soul, to go still further if the conditions are answered by the achievement of the divine aspirant. And this is the achievement of the human soul in its ascent towards the hill of Being that it halts at a point when it is satisfied with the delight of being in the physical existence. But howsoever wide and exalted it may look, it is still limited and bounded by a vaster existence, outreached and over-topped by many layers, levels, planes of worlds constituted and governed by the Cosmic Godhead. To reach the next stage a higher and wider and freer vitality and superb nerve-force is necessary. It is for this that the Ashvins are invoked; and they are to be satisfied first that the *madhu*, the delight of existence in the sphere of Dadhyan is realised, possessed and ready to be let known or offered to them, so that they can accept the offerings enabling them to return their responsive gifts of health and ease and joy for the reinforcing and renewal of life-force, for a sublime and expansive movement of the Soul's progress. This is the sense of the *madhu vidyā* that the Ashvins received from Dadhyan. Whether Dadhyan, like the Atharvan or the Angirasa, is a deified sage or humanised god, he represents a flame Power of the Divine Agni standing for upward human progress, embracing



and guarding the fixed light in the intellectual mould of mind-power. For he is an Angiras, a nine-rayed one, *navagva*, active, opens the stalls of the Cows (of Light) hidden by the Panis. (IX.108.4). If Atharva prepares the path to discover the luminous cows, Dadhyan, his offspring, opens the gate of the prison-house where they are kept in secret. He is an Agni power, for all Angirasas are flame-powers of Agni presiding over the Earth, the physical existence. But he receives the light on the level of the luminous mind and that light is the light of the Divine Mind, Indra. He guards the knowledge of the secret Delight, Madhu, and gives it out as a password to the Ashvins when the ascending or voyaging soul reaches the limit or a point when a still higher Power of a different order of existence has to intervene and take charge. But the password cannot be given in the language of the intellectual mind which is after all a term of lower light and knowledge howsoever illumined and saturated with the delight of existence it may be. It has to be communicated through something forceful and dynamic and therefore Dadhyan is provided with the horse's head by the Ashvins; it represents the dynamic strength and motive-force of the swift-moving powers of Life which in the main is a higher and wider constituent of the Cosmos engulfing, pressing upon and penetrating into the physical existence. That the symbolic significance of the name Dadhyan is primarily suggested by the word *dadhi* itself has been already stated. It will be interesting to note that the word is used in Rv.X.46.1. as an ad-

jective, meaning 'sustainer' or 'one who firmly holds intact (the sacrifice)' according to Sayana. This use of the word in the Rig Veda goes to some extent to support the symbolic meaning of Dadhi as *fixation* (of the yield of the Cow in the intellectual mind). But more important is the *dadhikra* or *dadhikrava*, the horse who occupies and possesses the *dadhi*. In Vamadeva's hymns to Dadhikrava (IV.38-40) and elsewhere Sayana says that he is some god, *kaścana devaḥ*; he also calls him a horse often. That Agni takes the form of a horse is often quoted by Sayana from the Brahmanas; but the Riks themselves speak of Agni becoming a horse. That the inner sense of *dadhikrava* is a special power of extraordinary dynamic energy taking possession of the force fixed in the illumined intellect will be clear from the contexts wherever the word occurs if we grasp the symbolic figure of *dadhi* as applied to Dadhyan. Another episode connected with him can be easily explained. In the hymns we find it stated that Indra slew ninety-nine Vritras with the bones of Dadhyan and that he found the horse's head in the hills in *Śaryanāvāt* (I.84.13, 14). The bones, the skeleton represents the physical frame; it has absorbed enough of the light of the Divine Mind and emanates powerful rays to dispel and annihilate almost all the surrounding darknesses of a many-sided ignorance typified by the ninety-nine *vṛtrāṇi*. For the complete destruction of all and not almost all the Vritras, the full number hundred is required. The last death-blow to effect the absolute destruction of the

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Vritra comes directly from Indra, not by the instrumentation of the secondary lustre emanating from the physical frame that lodges the radiant light fixed in the force of the illumined mind of intellect, Dadhyan.

Thus far we have taken up all the main references to Dadhyan in the Rig Veda and seen that he is an Atharvana, a specialised flame-power, an Angirasa, stationed actively in the domain of light fixed in the power of the intellectual mind, possessed of the secret of delight in the physical existence and passes it on to Ashvins; and they are the Twin Divine Powers who bestow on us harmony and beauty and health and ease by taking in and giving more, something of themselves, their sweetnesses, their luminous life-force and increasing raptures of joy in the Soul of Being in the individual and Cosmic existence.

#### THE TWIN DIVINE POWERS

Now we proceed to consider the aspect of dualism represented by the Twin Powers, Ashvins. Why are they always mentioned as an inseparable dual Godhead? There are some Gods who join with other Gods individually for effective action directed towards a definite purpose, and these are figured in the Vedic rites and are mentioned in the hymns also. Mitra and Varuna, Agni and Soma, Indra and Agni, Soma and Pushan are a few examples of dual Godheads but they are different and combine to form into a dual Divinity on occasions and then separate. But the Ashvins

are not separated from each other. They always appear together, never singly and in this sense they are inseparable. Not that they are identical or interchangeable, but are co-existent, interdependent for their effective functioning which they discharge in common. Therefore separate, they appear and act together. They are born 'separately, spotless *nānā jātau arepasā*', so sings the seer Paura Atreya (Rv. V. 73. 4). They always act together for the same purpose like two press-stones (Rv. II. 39). Gritsamada's hymn to Ashvins likens them to a splendid married pair, to the two lips that speak sweet words, to the two nostrils, two hands and to many other pairs all of which have common objects in their respective functions. What then, is the nature of the dualism that the Ashvins represent in principle? Earlier we mentioned the double principle of Light and Power that is constantly figured in the hymns of the Rishis. Certainly, no effective action anywhere in creation is possible without a biune principle governing it. Creation itself sprouts, grows, branches out, bears fruit from a root above, beyond the all we can comprehend and that is a biune principle inherent in the Absolute, the One-without-a-second in the parlance of the ancient Vedanta. It is the Force that inheres in the Consciousness of the Absolute Being which is the momentum for Creation. Consciousness without the Force is unthinkable and beyond expression; Force is nothing without its capital reserve and basis in the Consciousness of which it is a revelation and expression. One in being and purpose, yet they are

two in principle; distinct in formation they vary in kind and degree, Knowledge and Will or Light and Power; always the underlying double principle of all movements in Nature maintains itself and governs every field of creation. Even where appears a predominance of Will or Power there is the element of Knowledge or Light and *vice versa*. Therefore in the Vedic symbolism Ashvins are two distinct formations of the same Godhead for the same purpose but representing severally Light and Power or Knowledge and Will, with an intimacy of understanding and a mutual dependence. Because of their immediate relation of mutuality they embody the forces of harmony and beauty and health and joy. Their own archetypal interdependence and harmony in the cosmic functioning brings to bear on us the necessity of realising the interdependence of things and beings, the balance and harmony that is preserved among them by a unifying principle, by the great secret. Their mutual relation is that of a balance and harmony but neither of them can be explained by itself without the term of the other and therefore their mutual dependence and balance and harmony can be explained by that one secret, the Madhu, the Delight of being in all existence which effects, supports and holds them in close affinity. It is this Delight that makes possible the harmony and explains and unfolds the necessity of diverse forms in the manifested existence and gives them their value.

To realise the interdependence of things and beings, human and others is a necessary step towards a know-

ledge of the secret Delight that maintains the diversity for Self-expression and therefore for variations in form of the essential Self-delight. If it were a question of arriving at the Supreme Delight, the Ananda Brahman or Atman, the Self-delight, the doctrine of Madhu would not be necessary and the quoting of the Riks devoted to Ashvins would signify less than nothing. But the Madhu doctrine teaches that the diversity in creation is the manifestation of a secret Delight that all things, howsoever heterogeneous and warring they may appear, are held together by a secret harmony effected in them by the hidden creative Self-delight of the Supreme, who is the effulgent Self, the Immortal. The Upanishad perceives the Vedic truth of Madhu and the Ashvins and teaches here the seeking of Madhu in the manifestation of all things and beings and not the delight that is unrelated to the Cosmic Existence. It concludes with four verses two of which are Riks addressed to Ashvins, one is a verse—not a Rik—describing the soul as a bird, and the last again is a Rik to Indra as the original typal Form of all forms and this last is indeed an appropriate conclusion to the topic as it is the Delight in created forms that is the subject of instruction in this section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.



## THE MADHU DOCTRINE OF THE UPANISHAD\*

Here, then, is the Madhu doctrine as given in the text of this Vedantic Scripture. It gives fourteen illustrations to impress on us the truth that in this Creation everything and any part of it is Honey to the whole and the whole is Honey to every part of it; and that is because it is the Honey, the Secret Delight that abides in the whole creation and in every part and detail of it that manifests and makes possible the world-existence intact, and enjoyable, *bhogya*. "This earth", begins the Upanishad, "is honey for all beings and all beings are honey for this earth—and he who is in this earth the effulgent, immortal Purusha and he who is within one's being, in the body, the effulgent, immortal Purusha are indeed the same—He who is this Self, this Immortal, this Brahman, this All". In the same manner the text proceeds to exemplify the root principle of Madhu as the basis of this manifold existence by referring to the Waters, the Fire, the Wind, the Sound, the Quarters, the Moon, the Lightning, the Thunder, the Space, the Law (Dharma), the Truth, the Mankind and at last this Self which crowns the series. It further adds that this Self does not merely represent the basic principle of Madhu, the Bliss that abides in the heart of things, but he is the Master and King of all things and beings and holds together—as the hub and felly hold the

\* Brihadaranyaka Up. II. 5.

spokes—all beings, all gods, all worlds, all lives, all selves. “This is that Madhu which Dadhyan Atharvana declares to the Ashvins ; seeing this (truth) the Rishi said”—this is how the Upanishad justifies the quotation of the Riks in this context. We shall give here an English rendering of the Rik with as close a literalness as the English language would permit.

The seer Kakshivan, the son of Dirghatamas, addresses the Ashvins: “O heroes, I proclaim, as the thunder (proclaims) the rain, that mighty deed of yours for the acquiring (of Madhu) when with the horse’s head provided by you Dadhyan, offspring of Atharvan, made known to you the secret knowledge of Madhu”. (Rv. I. 116. 12). Again another Rik of the same seer (I. 117. 22) is cited in the text. “Ashvins, fulfillers of action, you sprang a horse’s head in the place of Atharvana Dadhyan’s ; and he acting in the Truth revealed to you the Madhu, the secret of Tvashtri (the Divine architect)”. The third verse is not from the Riks ; but though the language appears to belong to comparatively later times, the idea is as old as the hymns of the Rig Veda. For the bird in the Riks is quite often a symbol of the liberated soul that soars to the heights of Being. We know the Hamsa bird is the symbol of the supreme Soul. The famous Rik of Vamadeva “*Hamsaḥ Śuciṣad*” has still more familiarised us with this truth. The Upanishad now declares that the Madhu so far described is also the Madhu whose secret Dhadyan revealed to Ashvins and is the same as the creative Spirit, the

powers (creative conscious powers) moves on endowed with many forms; for yoked are his thousand steeds."

This is the Madhu doctrine of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. It is significant that it comes close upon the Maitreyi Brahmana which concludes with famous passages often quoted in support of the lofty Idealism represented in Shankara's exposition of the Advaita doctrine of later times. It serves as a corrective to the metaphysical excesses to which the closing lines of the preceding section are often interpreted to lend support. It reconciles the Absolute Idealism to which the Maitreyi Brahmana tends with the relative Realism of World-existence in which an all-embracing dualism is the dominant note. It teaches that the secret Honey, *kakṣyam madhu*, is the same as the Delight of the Purusha, the creative Spirit, the One and uncompromising Absolute of all dualisms, the unifying principle that balances, harmonises and maintains its own variations for Self-expression. This, then, is the Madhu of the Rig Veda also, the Madhu that the Ashvins received from Dadhyan, as has been appropriately cited by the Upanishad itself. That this Madhu Vidya is part of the Mystic Wisdom of Rig Vedic seers, discovered and recorded by the sages and thinkers of the early Vedanta is evident from the note of relevancy that runs through the citations of the suitable Riks of Kakshivan and Bharadwaja with which the conclusion of the section closes the chapter. These facts we have been enabled to find because of the substantial help that Sri Aurobindo has kept at our disposal. And if we have not

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

Now we come to the close of this short series of discourses on the central aspect of the Upanishads. The choice of the texts for the headline of each article was determined with an eye to what we consider to be the most important element, the practical side which is the soul of these Teachings. The texts were all chosen deliberately from the *Chāndogya* with the exception of one from the *Katha Upaniṣad*. The reason will be presently made clear. Now that we are concluding this series we shall put in sum the distinctive features of the Sadhanas dealt with as well as the elements common to all of them. The position we have taken up in regard to the Upanishads we shall explain briefly but in precise terms at the close.

It is generally held that two of the major Upanishads, the *Iśa* and the *Taittirīya* are most valued by Sri Aurobindo and they are a great support to his Teachings. There is considerable truth in this for the reason that the *Isha* gives us a comprehensive picture of the ultimate Truth, presents a reconciliation of the Opposites and closes with an appeal to the Gods of the Vedic pantheon Agni, Vayu, Surya, for the uplift of man; while the *Taittiriya* gives us a vision of Brahman in the graded existence as Matter, Life, Mind, Vijnana,

sutras much more than the Upanishads and the Gita that later became the field for the commentators to fight out the battles for their respective systems of Philosophy. A word about the Brahma-sutras, though an apparent digression, is useful here; for it is necessary to have a clear conception of their character and position in regard to the Scriptures on the one hand and on the other to the systems of Philosophy established by the Acharyas of later times. The main object of this work of Badarayana is investigation (*mīmāṃsā*) into the purport of the textual passages of the Upanishad including those which appear doubtful or contradictory and to come to a decisive conclusion. We may note in passing, that there was a threefold division of the *Śruti* into what is called the *Karma-kāṇḍa*, the section dealing with rituals, *Upāsana-kāṇḍa*<sup>1</sup> that dealing with worship and meditation and *Jñāna kāṇḍa* that dealing with Knowledge. In the Advaitic tradition of the later Vedantins the *Upāsanās* are drowned in the *Karma-kāṇḍa* and in the commentaries on the *Upāsanās* which form part of the topics in the Vedānta Sūtras, they are either treated as subservient to rituals, *karmāṅga*, or as some sort of help leading to a gradual

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<sup>1</sup> Jaimini the author of *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* is said to have written sixteen *Adhyāyās* of which the first twelve deal with the *Karma-kāṇḍa* and the last four with *Upāsanā*, called *Sankarāṣa-kāṇḍa* to which references are made in the *Sri Bhāṣya* of Ramanuja on Br. Sūtras, III. 3. But the work is lost and is not the same as its namesake available in the Adyar Library. This is the conclusion of specialists in Mimamsa like the late lamented MM. Ganganath Jha.

in life, to its encasement in mind as well as to its Source, Support, Power and Light in the all-pervading Purusha. It is the most comprehensive of all the Sadhanas and begins with the centre of the Spirit as soul, the seat of God—the heart ; it takes a survey of and aims at the realisation of the All Spirit becoming the soul in each. The Rishis seek from Ashvapati Kaikeya for a knowledge of the Universal Fire which is the Self in each and the all. This discipline called Vaishvanara Vidya aims at the realisation of the Cosmic Self active in each being and starts as usual with most of the Upanishadic Sadhanas, with the heart. We have not taken up all the Sadhanas mentioned in the Chhandogya Upanishad but the most prominent of them discussed here are sure to give a general idea of the importance attached to them in these texts and also cover most of the other main Vidyas such as the Dahara or Samvarga as has been shown in the discussion on Prana Vidya. From the *Brhadāranyaka* we took up for clarification the Doctrine of the Mystic Honey and showed that it reconciles the relative Reality of World-Existence with the Absolute Monism to which the *Brhadāranyaka* tends in some of its sections—notably the Maitreyi Brahmana which precedes the section on the Mystic Honey, called the Madhu Brahmana. Even this Upanishad which in some important parts is the stronghold for the “Lofty Illusionism” of the later Vedantins is not wholly in favour of the negation of world-existence but looks upon it as a Creation of Delight, an Existence which

subsists by interdependence of the whole and the part, a Manifestation which subsists because of the Honey, the Madhu in it. The chief points in the *Katha* text already discussed need not be repeated here. But there is one fact which must be borne in mind that has a bearing on the Sadhana, the practical aspect which was hinted. As a rule the Upanishads teach that the heart is the seat of the soul, the Self, the Divine Being and there one must enter and commune with and realise the Truth, God or Self, the object of his seeking. The *Katha* indeed throws luminous suggestions in regard to the actual Sadhana that arrives at the goal. But the subtle truth that no Sadhana is possible at all without faith at the very start shall not be missed. It is well known that Nachiketas was afflicted with doubt when he approached Yama but he had also the faith and says so, "Teach me, I have faith". In this connection the verses VI. 12-13, are remarkable in that they drive home the fact that It cannot be known by one who does not have the faith that It is there in him. It must be realised within one's own being as the Presence, as the Manifest in him and then its essential Truth as the Unmanifest dawns on him. The *Katha* emphasises the necessity of realising It here in the bodily existence.

The special feature of each of these Sadhanas lies in the view-points from which the approach is made towards the ultimate Reality, Atman, God, Brahman full of features or devoid of them. The Bhuma Vidya

starts with a strong and constant remembrance, *dhruvā smṛti*, an intuition—not the same as realisation—earned by purification of the stuff of the instrumental being, *sattva śuddhi*, which is the same as *dhātu-prasāda*, crystalline purity of the temperament. It aims at the realisation of Bhuma, the Plenum, the Infinite Self. The Prana Vidya starts with the Life-principle arriving at its source in the Creative Spirit, the Tapas or the active Consciousness of the Lord. The Shandilya discipline starts with the soul as related to the instruments of life and mind in the bodily existence, on the one hand and on the other, to the Light, Power and Will of the Universal Self—a most comprehensive vision that takes in a sweep all the complexities of the soul in its various aspects. The Universal Spirit, the Fire in each being and the all, the feeling and realisation in each of its oneness with the Cosmic Self and Cosmic Life is the theme of Ashvapati in the Vaishvanara Sadhana. The doubt about the survival of something of man that afflicts Nachiketas is just a surface appearance of the hunger of the soul with which Nachiketas starts and receives the initiation from Yama into the secrets of the Immortal Existence, Manifest and Unmanifest, to be realised in this life before the body falls.

But there is a feature common to all the Sadhanas. For there is no mention of the procedure of the particular Sadhana that is expounded, not to speak of the details at all. The Sadhana or Vidya as it is called, is just named after the Teacher or the Initiate or the



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central aspect of the Vidya itself with a few hints in regard to the object of realisation and its fruit, or even without any hint at all. The reason is not far to seek. For when we carefully go through these texts, ere long we discover the fact that these Sadhanas, these methods of approach were transmitted by the Master to the disciple and verbal instruction when necessary at all to accompany the initiation given, was either not recorded or only briefly hinted at in these Scriptures. And this is so because the real Sadhana begins with initiation and not with oral instruction though the latter may be in some cases helpful giving just a sort of mental satisfaction. This is the central truth of initiation that the Guru gives the method, not the written word, not the spoken word even; but he gives the Word in silence which is a power, an influence that emanates from his being and consciousness so tangibly received and felt that one may say that the Guru himself is born in the disciple, while at the same time the latter is the spiritual child of the Master. Thus an unbroken succession, *santati*, of these Vidyas was maintained in the olden times. The Guru, then, is one who has the capacity to reach his realisations to others who seek him for the knowledge. This truth about the initiation is implicit everywhere in the Upanishads and explicitly stated also in some places as when King Ashvapati addresses Aruni and others saying, "I shall make you realise" to which attention has been drawn in the discourse on Vaishvanara Vidya. Again, quite straightly the sages in the Prashna

Upanishad (VI.8) address the teacher Pippalada in these words : “Thou indeed art our Father who takes us safe across the other shore of ignorance.” Then there is the famous dictum of these scriptures so often quoted by the Acharyas, “He knows who has a Guru, *acāryavān puruṣo veda*”. We can take it that it is this fact about the true *Upadeśa* that is elucidated in the utterances of Sri Krishna in the Gita—“The Jnanins who are the seers of the truth shall give the initiation into knowledge....The Jnanin is Myself.”

It is beyond doubt that Sadhana was given through initiation by the teacher to the pupil and this accounts for the absence of details or elaborate explanations with which we are familiar in the writings of later treatises on the Sadhana Shastra. And again, one notable fact about the Sadhana of the Upanishads is this that even the most abstract form of Sadhana requires for its consummation some help from outside the range of the personal self. The help is obvious in the case of one having a Guru from the very start as has been already stated. Even in the Bhuma Vidya where the Sadhaka starts on the path with sufficient purity and strength, with a certain settled intuitive grasp of the Truth, it is said Skanda Sanatkumara has to favour him with his help to take him across the other shore of ignorance, sorrow and death. Or we find in the *Kena* that the Goddess Uma, the universal Matrix has to come to the help of the Gods headed by Indra for the true knowledge of the ultimate Reality, Brahman. Even in the instance of the Atma

Śādhana, the *Katha* and *Muṇḍaka* texts state that it is the Atman who reveals his own body (of Truth) to him who makes an exclusive choice of the Atman. We may note here the interesting fact that the Atman according to these Scriptures has a will to choose, to reveal its body of Truth thus implying that he is not as mute and absolutely immutable and static as our mind is trained to fancy, not absolutely devoid of the dynamic element, namely, to choose to reveal himself to the exclusive seeker. Or the exclusive seeking itself is the result of the choice that has already been made by the Self. Thus different approaches and their corresponding realisations are mentioned in the Upanishads.

There is another feature common to all these texts. When statements are made either in regard to the disciplines that yield the desired results or to the ultimate Reality which apparently differ, they are not treated as contradictory but are looked upon as authentic, each in its own context. An instance will suffice to show that this is the case. There are texts which proclaim that there are “Two Purushas unborn, *dvau ajau*” ; again there are others which speak of the Reality as the One Absolute ; at times the same text may contain two different statements which may not seem to be in accord with each other. We find that the authors of the Upanishads nowhere refute any of these texts or statements in part as opposed to truth or as unworthy of notice, but on the other hand treat them as authentic because they know they are

statements of facts of spiritual experience. They do not even take the trouble of reconciling such statements as are seemingly opposed to one another because they are alive to the fact that all such apparent contradictions have no bases in the realm of the Truth which can be realised in diverse ways through many aspects. It is not that a reasoned reconciliation of the opposites was not known to them as is evidenced in the texts of the Isha Upanishad. The question of attempting a reconciliation yielding a certain amount of intellectual satisfaction did not occupy the attention of the seers and thinkers of the Upanishads, but was left to Badarayana, the author of the Vedanta Sutras. But the commentators who came later on constructed their Systems of Philosophy always based upon a Truth-realisation—as indeed Philosophy in India has always been—,sought support for their systems from the Scriptures including the Brahma-sutras. In the process of interpreting the Sutras for their support they have for the most part undone the work of reconciliation undertaken by the author of the Sutras. This was because each commentator found certain texts to be convenient and accorded them a place of honour and prime importance, while those that were found not helpful from their standpoint and quite inconvenient for their philosophical constructions were treated as of secondary value. And this was done in spite of the recognition on their part that these texts as a whole are authentic records of Knowledge gained by the sages of the early Vedantas. The

resultant position was inescapable that sheer dialectics led to the ditches, to the trenches of philosophical warfare while knowledge and action, *jñāna* and *karma*, and latterly, devotion, *bhakti*, became discordant and warring elements what were and should have been shown to be the elements of concord and peace for a synthetic grasp of these great Scriptures of universal importance.

Our position then in regard to the Upanishads, especially to their practical importance, may be best stated in the words of Sri Aurobindo who finds that each of the realisations is true and the truth of any one need not and does not nullify the truth of any other. "In liberation the individual soul realises itself as the One (that is yet Many). It may plunge into the One and merge or hide itself in its bosom—that is the *laya* of the Advaita ; it may feel its one-ness and, yet as part of the Many that is the One, enjoy the Divine, that is the Vishishtadvaita liberation ; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Brindavan, that is the Dvaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated, remain in the Lila or Manifestation or descend into it as often as it likes. The Divine is not bound by human philosophies—it is free in its play and free in its essence."

One more feature—and this is the last to be mentioned here—common to these Upanishads is that they purport to bring out the truth of the Mantras, the Veda ; even for their conclusions, for their announcements, they quote for their support as authority

the Vedic seers and their words, the Riks. The appropriateness of the Riks quoted in the Doctrine of the Mystic Honey is an instance in point. The Riks or their seers are very often quoted or mentioned in these texts and this is not due to any kind of sentimental regard, but due to the fact that the sages of the Upanishads knew that there were truths of spiritual and occult knowledge embedded in the Vedas. We have already shown in the discourse on the Vaishvanara Vidya that the discipline was directly inspired by the Hymns of the Rig Veda and quoted a number of passages from the Hymns addressed to Agni Vaishvanara. Above all, Sri Aurobindo has shown beyond a shadow of doubt that the 15th and 16th verses of the Isha Upanishad which refer to the Golden Lid covering the face of the Truth are a just reproduction in the language of the Upanishads of the first Rik of the 62nd Hymn in the fifth Mandala of the Rig Veda. Here we may add that there is hardly any among the major Upanishads which does not make a reference to the Riks or Rishis by way of authenticating their statements.

Now we conclude: our approach to the subject differs in some important respects from that of modern scholarship led by western savants and generally accepted and followed by Indian learning of modern times. Our position in regard to the character and aim of the Upanishads is fundamentally at variance with that taken by scholars in general and to some extent, in one important respect, by indigenous



scholarship as well. While it is a fact we admit that the Upanishads are pre-eminently Books of Knowledge, we also hold that it is the Veda that is the source and support of the Upanishads as well as of the Brahmanas which are the Scripture for the ritualists and that it is wrong to treat the Veda, the Mantras as part of the Karma-kanda meant chiefly for the rituals and thus in practice, though not in belief and theory, inferior to the Upanishads for purposes of spiritual Wisdom. Again, we hold that the Upanishads are not, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, 'philosophical speculations of the intellectual kind, a metaphysical analysis which labours to define notions, to select ideas and discriminate those that are true, to support the mind in its intellectual preferences by its dialectical reasoning.' On the contrary, they are the creation 'of a revelatory and intuitive mind and its illumined experience and all their substance, structure, phrase, imagery, movement are determined by and stamped with this original character'. Nor are they 'a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret'.

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